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SELECTIONS FROM BROWNING

EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY

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INTRODUCTION

Browning's Life

Robert Browning was born at Camberwell, a suburb of London, May 7, 1812. His father, also Robert Browning, was a clerk in the Bank of England, and had married Sarah Anne Wiedermann, the daughter of a German shipowner, settled in Scotland. This elder Robert Browning had been sent as a young man by his father to manage an estate in the West Indies, but such was his hatred of slavery that he relinquished his employment, quarrelled with his father, and returned to England to live by his own resources. His position in the Bank of England gave him a moderate income, and he generously left his son free to choose the most unremunerative of professions. As the poet recorded gratefully after his father's death: "He secured for me all the ease and comfort that a literary man needs to do good work." The elder Browning was himself something of a poet, an artist, a student of classical literature, and a great explorer among curious books; but above all he was a man of high principle, pure character, and sympathetic and cheerful temperament. Mrs. Browning, the poet's mother, was described by Carlyle as "the true type of Scottish gentlewoman." She was possessed at the same time of a deep and simple piety and of an artistic nature which found expression in music and drawing. She was a lover of dumb animals, a trait which her son shared, as is shown in his poetry by countless passages of keen, kindly observation.

From these parents Robert Browning inherited his character and tastes, if not his genius.

Robert Browning and his sister Sarah Anna, two years younger, grew up in Camberwell. He was not sent to a public school, but studied under private tutors, except for a short term at the University of London. He had much time for his own personal interests — for music, for looking at pictures at the Dulwich gallery, for reading and writing poetry. In these days poetry possessed a special attraction for a boy of serious and ardent temperament. The formal verse of the eighteenth century, such as Browning's father loved, had been replaced for the younger generation by the new poetry, in which the men of what we call the Romantic Movement asserted their freedom to think and to feel, to live and to write, as individuals, in defiance of the conventions of the past. The young Browning had immediately before him the examples of Burns, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats, and while still a lad he began to prepare himself to join their great company. Byron, then at the height of his fame, was the first influence under which Browning found inspiration for his boyish attempts. But a little later he happened to come upon a copy of Shelley's *Queen Mab*, in a book-stall, and at once fell under the spell of this fascinating new poet. His mother with some difficulty obtained for him the other poems of Shelley, and it was in a kind of spiritual brotherhood with that most ardently romantic and freedom-loving poet that Robert Browning began his formal career in poetry. He loved to fancy that the spirits of Shelley and his brother poet John Keats were embodied in two nightingales, who sang in his father's garden at Camberwell.

Indeed, in these youthful years Browning justified to the full the adjective "romantic." "A bright, handsome youth with long black hair falling over his shoulders," he looked,

to the actor William Macready, "more like a youthful poet than any man I ever saw." In his disregard of social forms he reminds us of Shelley. It is related of him that, calling on a gentleman of his acquaintance and not finding him at home, he abruptly asked if he might play the piano while he waited. In imitation of Shelley he asserted his freedom from the prejudices of society by declaring himself an atheist and a vegetarian. Naturally, his hero-worship found expression in verse. His first important poem, *Pauline*, published in 1833, is, like Shelley's *Alastor*, a study of the dangers which beset the soul of a poet; and it is evident that, like Shelley, Browning is giving us through his hero a rather morbid interpretation of his own imaginary experience. Two years later, in 1835, appeared a much more powerful poem, — *Paracelsus*, a study of the life of the early Renaissance scientist and physician. Here the form is dramatic; the hero speaks with his friends, uncovering the failure of a man who tries to serve mankind by knowledge only, and not by love; yet here also we feel that Browning is writing of problems of life which belong to himself rather than to the character through whom he chooses to express them.

Browning was at work upon a third study of the poet's mind and heart, a story which took its name from that of the almost unknown Italian poet Sordello, when he was called to attempt a more impersonal method of work. The actor William Macready proposed to him to write a play. The result was *Strafford*, a drama founded on the tragic career of the minister of Charles I., which was produced at Covent Garden Theatre in 1837. It was not highly successful, and Browning returned to *Sordello*. He published that most difficult and obscure of his works in 1840.

In spite of the doubtful success of *Strafford*, Browning continued to write plays. It is true, they were not entirely

suited for the stage, being too heavily freighted with thought upon abstract themes and deficient in action, yet this interest in the drama attests his effort to get away from personal subjects, and to deal with the world of men and their problems in an objective, impersonal way. This effort was characteristic of nearly all his later work, and is indicated by such titles as *Dramatic Romances*, *Men and Women*, *Dramatis Personæ*, and *Dramatic Idyls*. He made much use of the form known as the monologue, in which the character speaks out his own defence or tells his own story. Even the most personal of all forms of poetry, the lyric, Browning made dramatic. The *Dramatic Lyrics*, published in 1842, he explains, are so called precisely because they are "the utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine."

The first perfect fruit of this conscious attempt to portray the lives of others was *Pippa Passes* (1841). While writing *Sordello* Browning had gone to Italy, in 1838, and had discovered, in the foot-hills of the Venetian Alps, the little town of Asolo. This he made the background for a kind of drama in five scenes. In the first, Pippa, the little Italian girl, awakes on the morning of her only holiday of the year, and goes forth singing. Her songs fall upon the ears of four different groups of people, and each time help some soul to choose aright in a crisis of temptation. The theme of the poem, the innate goodness of creation, and the unconscious working together for good among its creatures, is Browning's real faith, and is expressed everywhere in his poetry.

Pippa Passes was the first number of a series of publications called "Bells and Pomegranates." The title was suggested by a verse in the Bible (Exodus xxviii. 33), and, as Browning explained later, was meant to indicate "a mixture of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought." Altogether there were eight numbers published under this title, including *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic*

Lyrics and Romances (1845), and several of the dramas, among them *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* and *Colombe's Birthday* (1843). *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* was written for Macready, and presented by him, but under such conditions that failure was inevitable.

The publication of *Paracelsus* had brought Browning to the notice of literary men, and he had then begun to enjoy the friendship of Carlyle, Dickens, Forster, and Tennyson. The several numbers of "Bells and Pomegranates," though they did not bring him popularity, served to strengthen him in the opinion of true critics of poetry. Among them was Elizabeth Barrett, herself a poet, whose works were much more widely read than Browning's. In "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," (1845) she introduced an appreciative reference to the "Pomegranates," and Browning wrote a letter of cordial thanks. Miss Barrett had been injured by a fall from her horse some years before, and was regarded by her father as a helpless invalid. She was confined to her room, where she saw only a few close friends. Among them was her cousin, John Kenyon, who was also a friend of the Brownings. Through his mediation the two poets had already come to know of each other somewhat intimately. Soon after his letter, therefore, Miss Barrett consented to receive Browning, and this first visit was immediately followed by an offer of marriage. Inasmuch as Miss Barrett had not put her foot to the ground for years, this proposal was somewhat too startling to be successful at once, but in the end Browning's persistent faith triumphed. It was useless to think of gaining Mr. Barrett's consent, and so, in September, 1846, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett were secretly married, and the next day, with like secrecy, they departed for Paris, and thence for Italy.

Thus in 1846 there began for Browning what he repeatedly calls the fulfilment of the one great purpose of his being.

The fifteen years of the Brownings' life in Italy were years made beautiful by all the resources of that wonderful country, and still more by an inward light of joy and peace which makes theirs one of the great love stories of the world. They settled first at Pisa, where Byron and Shelley had lived. Then they went on to Florence, where the Casa Guidi was their home for many years. Here their son was born, and here they lived and worked, Browning finding leisure for various experiments in arts other than poetry, and here they made a home for friends from England who broke in on their exile. As Mrs. Browning grew constantly stronger they travelled, and hints of their Italian journeys to Venice, to Rome, and elsewhere are to be found in Browning's poems of the time. It was at Fano, on the eastern coast, that they saw the picture by Guercino, celebrated in "The Guardian Angel." It was from a walk near the Baths of Lucca that the woodland scene in "By the Fireside" was drawn. But it was not only the beauty of Italian landscape and the wealth of Italian art that bound them to Italy. The Italian people in their several little states were moving for freedom from foreign rulers, and for unity under the King of Sardinia. Revolution was a constant factor in Italian life, giving opportunities for individual devotion and sacrifice; and Italian politics were touched with the romantic fascination that came from the high aim of national unity. Mrs. Browning, indeed, gave much of her poetry to the Italian people. Her *Casa Guidi Windows* and *Napoleon III in Italy* are full of genuine patriotism, and her death is said to have been in a measure attributable to sorrow at the death of the Italian statesman, Cavour. But Browning also was in most cordial sympathy with the movement, and unquestionably his dealing with men and women in his poetry gained intensity from his presence in a land where the issues of human conduct were constantly fraught with life and death. Thus it is hard

to conceive of a happier situation for a poet than was Browning's in these years of his Italian residence. In contact with the magnificent past of the Renaissance, and with the vivid present of revolutionary Italy, with the dream of his own life wrought into perfect fulfilment, he would seem to have had in himself and his environment all the stuff of great poetry. And indeed in these years Browning did produce his most profound and subtle studies of human character, and his most uplifting interpretations of the meaning of life.

The books which contain the fruit of these years are *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* (1850), and *Men and Women* (1855). The latter is a collection of poems based usually upon the imaginary experience of others, interpreted by personal sympathy, as in "Andrea del Sarto," "Two in the Campagna," "A Grammarian's Funeral," and sometimes uttered with the eloquence of personal conviction, as in "Saul" and "By the Fireside." In the volume which succeeded *Men and Women*, *Dramatis Personæ* (1864), this note of personal conviction is still clearer, and there may well be due to Browning's resolute reaction against a blow which might have crushed him. On June 28, 1861, Mrs. Browning died. Her death brought Browning's life in Italy to an end. Almost immediately he took his resolution. "Life must now be begun anew," he wrote, "all the old cast off and the new one put on. I shall go away, break up everything, go to England, and live and work and write." Something of this energetic decision to make the best of this life, touched with the inspiration of a belief in a life to come, appears in such poems as "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and "Prospice" in the volume of 1864.

Browning settled in London, which remained his home for many years, except for short excursions to the coast of France. During the eight years immediately following, however, his effort was largely given to working over some of

the material of his Italian sojourn into what proved to be his longest poem, and one of the longest of modern times, *The Ring and the Book*. Sometime during his residence in Florence he had picked up an old book containing a tragic story of the late seventeenth century, — the forced marriage of a young girl, her flight from the cruelty of her husband, her murder by him, and his own trial and conviction. This tale, involving many subordinate characters, Browning told and retold in twelve books, trying in this way, by testing the material from many points of view, to extract all the human motives involved in it. The method is dramatic. Count Guido, the husband, Pompilia, the girl-wife, Caponsacchi, her rescuer, the lawyers, who wrangle on both sides, and the Pope, who finally judges the cause, each utters his own interpretation of the facts. The poem, then, is a tremendous example of the use of the monologue, which Browning had found elsewhere to suit best his plan of dramatic workmanship.

The Ring and the Book was published in 1868 and 1869, and was at once the means of bringing Browning into recognition as one of the two greatest English poets of the later nineteenth century. From this time on he had no lack of public favour. He was honoured by the universities of Great Britain: he was acclaimed by societies founded in his honour to explain and to propagate his gospel. During these years he went much into the world of London, becoming the most social of men of letters since Thackeray. His interest in things human found expression in conversation as readily as in verse. These were years also of great productiveness. The study of the Greek dramatists had always been a leading interest of Browning's mind, and after *The Ring and the Book* he devoted himself to presenting his favourite among them, Euripides, in the admirable *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871), with its accompanying summary

of the drama *Alcestis*. *Aristophanes' Apology* followed in 1875, and the translation of the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus in 1877. He continued to write dramatic monologues, and long narratives in verse, such as *Red Cotton Night Cap Country* (1873) and *The Inn Album* (1875). In general it must be admitted that Browning's later work, like Wordsworth's, shows the defects of the qualities which gave distinction to his earlier poetry. Especially is this true of the collection called *Pacchiarotto with other Poems* (1876), where the brilliant originality of his utterance is clouded by obscurity and oddity. The *Dramatic Idyls*, however, which appeared in two series in 1879 and 1880, contain some of his best told stories, notably, "Pheidippides," "Mulèykeh," and "Clive."

Toward the close of his life Browning frequently returned to Italy, but not to Florence. He spent much time at Venice, and rediscovered the little town of Asolo which had furnished the background of *Pippa Passes*. At Asolo in the summer of 1889 the last volume of his verse was collected and sent to the publishers, the little book known as *Asolando*, the reflection of the Indian summer of his genius, which contains so many haunting reminiscences of his full strength and glory. He returned to Venice in the autumn, to the Palazzo Rezzonico, which belonged to his son, and there, December 12, 1889, he died. He was buried on December 31, in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Browning's Poetry

Browning's poetry is the result, not of his personality alone, but of that personality as it entered into and became a part of the life of the nineteenth century. In order to explain Browning as a poet we must take account of his relation to his time, and first of all of his poetic ancestry.

As has been said, Browning's boyhood was passed under the influence of the movement in English literature known as Romanticism. The Romantic Movement may be defined as a kind of spiritual revolution, in which men sought a new freedom, not merely of thought, but of imagination, of feeling, and of expression. In poetry it showed itself as an effort to escape from the limited world of eighteenth-century civilisation, into larger realms of actual or imagined experience. Under its impulse the poets, instead of holding themselves within the limits which convention, in the name of "common-sense" and "good taste," had placed upon the subject matter and the form of poetry, reached out for new themes and interests. Burns and Wordsworth turned to Nature and the life of man in contact with Nature; Scott, to the mediæval past; Byron, to remote lands; Shelley, to dreams of individual liberty and the social millennium. And these poets, instead of writing in the heroic couplet prescribed by eighteenth-century taste, sought a variety of form to match their variety of subject matter. The first years of the nineteenth century were thus a period of intense poetic excitement, a period which came to an end with the third decade, when Byron, Shelley, and Keats had died, and Scott, Coleridge, and Wordsworth were practically in retirement. Thereafter the chief phenomenon in the spiritual history of Europe is not the emancipation of feeling and imagination, but the vast increase of knowledge, and the attempt to revise old ideas of religion, philosophy, and social systems in the light of new science and history, — an attempt with which are connected the names of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Huxley.

Now Browning's life began when the romantic enthusiasm of the first period was beginning to wane, and was lived mainly in the second period, that of scientific progress, of uncertainty in matters of faith, of the rise of democracy, and

the increase of industry and wealth. It has been held that this period was unfriendly to art, and that its scientific and material interests were not such as could be treated by the poet, who must therefore either separate himself from his time, or else cease from writing poetry. Browning did not find this to be the case. We must think of him, rather, as carrying the spirit of romanticism into the new and larger world of fact. He accepted to the full the freedom of the poet to deal with all the phenomena of the universe, in the past and the present. The first impression that we gain from a glance over his volumes is that of immense variety in subject matter. He deals with all the great periods of world history, Athens in her glory, early Christianity, the Middle Age, the Renaissance, the Nineteenth Century. His geography is world wide. And in the types of character, the varieties of experience which he presents, he reflects the complexity of modern life.

All this marks Browning as a representative poet of the nineteenth century. Of all his contemporaries, except Whitman, he is most completely sympathetic with the life of his time, most comprehensive in his interests, most democratic in his outlook. Other poets of the time preserve the tradition of romanticism with a certain wistful looking backward at earlier and simpler ages. Though, like Tennyson, they deal with the present and its problems, they choose their subjects carefully, as if treading somewhat gingerly the the shore of the sea of modern life, a little disturbed by its confusion and noise. Browning, on the contrary, plunges in boldly, delighting in the strong surf and the pungent odour. He takes all human life as his province, and treats that life, not only as it is expressed in dignified political institutions like feudalism, and important people like King Arthur, but in individuals of all ages of history and of every worldly station.

In this freedom with which Browning used the resources of the world for poetry, he is a romanticist. In the conscientious effort toward accuracy with which he dealt with his themes he is something much more modern — a realist. The early romanticists were not much hampered by a sense of fact. They moved freely in their newly discovered worlds by the light of imagination. But the sense of fact is precisely what the modern world, with its science, has been most interested in developing, and perhaps for this reason it has become impatient of romantic poetry in the old-fashioned sense. With this tendency of his age Browning was in instinctive sympathy. In all the variety of his subject matter there is the sense of control, scholarly or practical, of the material. In the historical fields in which he particularly liked to work he made himself by study, if not an absolute master, at least a man who had a right to his opinion; and on certain themes he wrote with the authority of a specialist. In writing *Sordello* he worked up the history of Lombardy in the thirteenth century as carefully as for a historical essay. But in general Browning did not "get up" his subjects because he had a poem to do. On the contrary, his poetry grew out of a fresh, first-hand interest in the subject. For example, he has written many poems on musicians and artists, showing a knowledge both historical and technical of the fine arts that no other poet has had, and that makes him peculiarly the poet of the artist class. This poetry grew out of the fact that Browning was intensely and and genuinely absorbed in music from boyhood to old age; from the fact that sculpture so fascinated him that he practised modelling in the studio of Mr. Story, the American sculptor. In other words, Browning lived before he wrote: his poetry came from his interest in life, an interest so strong as to lead him into study and experiment. His work has thus a sense of reality, of dealing with the actual world in an

actual way, which deserves special emphasis because it makes common ground between the poet and the intellectual tendency of the time. It is true, in some of Browning's poems his interest in fact has outrun his interest in poetic expression. He sometimes expects his reader to share his enthusiasm for his subject, and to follow him into minute detail by virtue of hints given in a kind of versified short hand. But on the other hand, we are more often surprised at the poetic energy which could so brilliantly convert the hard fact of the real world into inspiring poetry.

In another respect Browning was a romanticist — in his invention of a particular form of verse for each occasion. The sense of bewilderment that comes to one before the vast extent of Browning's material is increased when one considers the different combinations of rhythm, of metre, of rhyme-scheme and stanza-form in which it is presented. It is as when one awakes from his amazement at the sheer immensity of the ocean to wonder at the infinite variety in the form of its waves. And in this respect, as in the range of his material, Browning surpassed even the boldest of his predecessors. He was always inventing, experimenting, discovering; and his originality was not merely a prejudice in favor of the unusual. The form of a poem is always with him a reflection of its subject, or of the character of the person who is speaking. For instance, Browning often writes of men in movement, walking, running, riding, driving, — making the rhythm of his lines appropriate to the action. There are four poems in the present collection which represent horseback-riding, and which, in their various rhythms, suggest the different paces of a horse. These are all quite different in movement from the deep-breathed lines which tell of the flight of Pheidippides. In the poems which are founded upon music, the light tinkle of Galuppi's clavichord is altogether remote from the stately harmonies of Abt

Vogler's orchestra-organ. In the lyrical measures the correspondence between metre and thought is often still more subtle and alluring. It is true that occasionally in his later work Browning matched his theme with a form that seems only deliberately uncouth or grotesque, but these failures should not blind us to the fact that in most cases his boldness has been justified by his skill.

Another quality of Browning's art is significant of his connection with modern life. The increase of knowledge which has been characteristic of his time, and the spirit of scepticism in regard to results which has accompanied it, have made it impossible for the poet, in dealing with any subject, however small, to advance upon it with an air of authority, to survey it from all sides, and to pronounce a final word upon it. Accordingly, Browning generally surveys his subject from one point of view, looks at it through one pair of eyes — an actor's or a spectator's — and makes his report specific within those limits. This method is the source of frequent misunderstanding by the unpractised reader, who forgets that the poet is not trying to give a complete and authorized account of events, but only a partial and disjointed one, such as an eye-witness might gain. The logical result of this method, when it aspires toward completeness, is *The Ring and the Book*.

In the face of the variety of subject matter which Browning's work offers us, and the shifting point of view from which it is treated, it is a puzzling task to arrive at the author's own philosophy or view of life. And, indeed, it is to be said that Browning's poems are not primarily concerned with any single theory. They deal not with man in the abstract, but with men as individuals, not with general conceptions about life, but with life itself in its infinite number of special cases. Browning was interested in each case as it occurred to him, content to work at it for the sake of the elements

which it possessed in itself, without attempting to make it typical of the eternal order of the universe. He is therefore to be classed rather with the realists, who picture the world as it appears to them, justifying each sketch by its truth to life, than with the idealists, who present schemes of the world as a whole to which all its various aspects are subordinated. He is of the school of Balzac, rather than that of Dante. It is the human, not the divine comedy, with which he by preference deals.

There are, however, certain conclusions which, by virtue of their reiteration in his poetry or the personal emphasis with which they are stated, we may consider to be Browning's own principles of life. For example, the fact that he deals constantly with the individual shows us that he read the meaning of life and measured its value from the point of view of the individual, not from that of society. The world, in Browning's opinion, does not exist for the working out of a scheme of human happiness through a perfect social organization. It is a place for the testing and discipline of men and women, where they may run their race with success or failure. Success differs with the circumstances of the case, but it always depends on certain elements. The first of these are the qualities of the man of action — daring, energy, persistence. Even where there is no certainty of the cause in which these virtues are exercised, they are to be commended for themselves alone. The general vices which Browning everywhere attacks are hesitation, inaction, unsteadiness of purpose. This primitive delight in action, as it is the first element in Browning's philosophy, so it is the first quality to charm his reader. Whatever we may think of Browning's message, we can hardly escape the attraction of his picture of human struggle and endeavour.

But effort, even when followed by attainment of its object, is not all. A second element in individual success, as

Browning understood it, is dissatisfaction with every accomplishment, in the belief that there is better to be won beyond it. Next to the fault of not starting at all is that of having a goal too easily won, and of being satisfied with it. "A man's reach should exceed his grasp," we are told in "Andrea del Sarto." The sorrows and disappointments of life, even its defeats, are of value as they prevent us from accepting complacently any attainment as final, as they remind us that any dream of the perfect is an illusion in a world of which the glory is its imperfection, and its call to effort.

> Then welcome each rebuff,
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go.

Thus the purpose of life, in Browning's view, is not the attainment of any specific end, either selfish or heroic, but rather the continued progress of the human spirit in its chosen course, — a progress without limit because of the possibilities of development opening forever before it.

It may be objected that this view of the world as a stage for the activity of human beings is irrational unless we see also a final end toward which they are striving, and which by its attainment will justify their effort. To this Browning seems everywhere to reply that the worth of living depends on belief in life itself and trust in it. Apart from any philosophical interpretation of the world, the very fact of it is to be taken as an unquestionable good. As for the so-called "evils of life," the remedy for them is more activity, energy, vitality. This optimism underlies Browning's presentation of his world of men and women. They as individuals revolve in their orbits, and whither they are bound he can tell us as little as he can tell us the destination of the solar system in its journey through space. Never mind. The mere fact of movement, of life, is enough. Browning has

celebrated the joys of living in "Saul." He has declared the essential goodness of the world in the language of reason in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and in the language of instinct in the songs in *Pippa Passes*. In both cases, however, it is clear that Browning is not uttering his belief in any explanation of life, but rather his faith in life itself, in the value of experience apart from any goal to which that experience may lead.

In this view of the world as a place for individual experience and development two special faiths are of peculiar value to the poet, the faith in love and that in immortality. The former is closely connected with Browning's insistence upon the virtue of activity. It is love which most often supplies the principle of action, the energy which sets inert humanity in motion. It is love which fills the soul with courage to defy obstacles and dangers, which "keeps the nerves at strain," and helps one "to dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall." And love is not only the mood of action, but also of insight, and understanding, and kinship with spiritual things. In short, love gives the individual the great, the supreme moments in his existence, those which test most searchingly his character and strengthen him most effectively for conquest. Naturally, with this view of the primary importance of love in developing human character Browning gives many poems to the consideration of the relations of men and women. All sorts of love stories, love situations, love scenes are told or hinted at in his verse. Among these love poems there is a large class which calls for special notice because it represents a striking departure from the ordinary mood of the poet. Browning's poems of misdirected or unsuccessful love lead not to the sense of tragedy in life, but rather point to his optimistic interpretation of the world. The fact of love, like the fact of life, is a human good, whatever the object or the outcome. Nay, even if it end in disappoint-

ment, it carries with it the inspiration of the imperfect, of something remaining to be achieved.

> If you loved only what were worth your love
> Life were clear gain and wholly well for you,

which, as we have already seen, Browning thinks is by no means wholly well, as a state of the soul. No.

> Make the old nature better by your throes.
> Give earth yourself. Go up for gain above.

Here we touch Browning's belief in immortality, which is a necessary corollary to his faith in life, in experience, as a good in and for itself. For if the justification of life is mere living, then the cessation of life by death is a greater tragedy than if there were some social purpose toward which our lives tended, and which could be fulfilled by our successors. Accordingly, on the same grounds on which he believes in the goodness of life, "the mere living," from the individual's point of view, Browning also believes in the continuance of that life in personal immortality. He draws out the argument in detail in "Saul," but after all immortality is not a matter of reason with him so much as it is one of feeling. It is absolutely necessary to give meaning to the training in activity and endurance which this world provides, and to the aspiration toward greater attainment than the possibilities of this life afford. It suggests a value for all the seemingly wasted human effort, the "apparent failures," "the instincts immature and purposes unsure," for

> The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
> The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky.

It is the certainty (for with Browning it is nothing less) of immortality that puts its seal upon the central fact of his philosophy, his belief in "the glory of the imperfect."

Browning's Place in English Literature

Robert Browning is perhaps the most energetically admired figure in English literature of the present day. He has gained, if not the largest, at least the most eagerly devoted body of readers; his work has aroused the deepest interest and enthusiasm. This popularity, it is true, came to him only after many years of neglect and disapproval. The substance of his poetry, and its novel, unconventional form long remained obstacles to any wide appreciation. Browning himself well understood this, but he held his course firmly, notwithstanding. "I cannot alter myself," he said to Tennyson; "people must take me as they find me." At length people did so. In the end his very novelty and unconventionality commended him to the reading public; the difficulties of his style became a stimulus to the curiosity and the mental energy of many readers; and thus the result has been that, from appealing to a fit audience though few, Browning has come to be acclaimed as peculiarly the poet of the age, and worshipped with a zeal of admiration which goes beyond the more tempered commendation accorded to his contemporaries, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and Swinburne.

Undoubtedly, there is something a little misleading in the attitude of many of Browning's followers. With the reaction in his favour, they have tended to exaggerate the obscurity and the difficulty of his poetry, from a natural temptation to exaggerate the importance of Browning scholarship. They have overlaid the really simple — and much of Browning's writing is this — with layer upon layer of needless explanation; and they have tortured the really complex — and there is much of this also — into meaning many contradictory things. Thus there is danger that Browning's partisans will do their poet a real injury by turning away from

him the normal, natural-minded men, women, and children for whom he wrote. One must remember that Browning himself always regarded Browning scholarship with amusement; that he declared himself no Browningite. There is something of mild satire in his reported reply when he was asked about the meaning of one of his poems: "When that poem was written two people knew what it meant, God and Robert Browning. Now there is only one. Only God knows."

Browning's permanent reputation will rest, not upon the part of his work which is obscure and far-fetched, but upon that which is immediately interesting, powerful, and easy to understand. And this is all that the ordinary reader need concern himself with. If he looks for story, he will find in Browning wonderful narratives told with intense appreciation for action, narratives such as "Pheidippides" or "Hervé Riel." If he seeks for description, he will find the circumstances of life in Italy rendered with rich appreciation in "The Englishman in Italy," or the recurring charm of the English springtime in "Home Thoughts from Abroad." If he seeks for studies of character and comment on human life and its lessons, he will find them in "Andrea del Sarto" and "A Toccata of Galuppi's." If he seeks for higher inspiration he will turn to "Saul" and "Abt Vogler." And for the rendering of the emotion of a moment or of a life-time in the purest song let him read "My Star," or "One Way of Love." All of these and many others like them are part of every English-speaking person's inheritance, and the real contribution of Robert Browning to English poetry.

The Selections

In the present collection an attempt has been made to present Browning in the order in which his poems would

naturally appeal to one who has not read them. First are given poems of action and narratives; second, poems of places; third, love poems; and fourth, poems of character, including those in which Browning's own temperament and attitude toward life are most clearly expressed.

Nearly all the poems of the present collection are from Browning's early period, 1835 to 1870. From *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) are taken "Cavalier Tunes," "Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr," "Incident of the French Camp," "Count Gismond," "Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli," "My Last Duchess."

From *Dramatic Lyrics and Romances* (1845): "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent To Aix," "The Boy and the Angel," "Home Thoughts from Abroad," "The Englishman in Italy," "Meeting at Night," "Parting at Morning," "The Lost Mistress," "The Lost Leader," "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church."

From *Men and Women* (1855): "Childe Roland," "Up at a Villa, Down in the City," "De Gustibus," "My Star," "A Serenade at the Villa," "The Last Ride Together," "By the Fireside," "Misconceptions," "Love in a Life," "Life in a Love," "Two in the Campagna," "Evelyn Hope," "In Three Days," "One Way of Love," "One Word More," "The Patriot," "Andrea del Sarto," "A Toccata of Galuppi's," "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Saul," "The Guardian Angel."

From *Dramatis Personæ* (1864), "Abt Vogler," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "Prospice."

As examples of Browning's later and more intricate style are given "Hervé Riel" (1871), "Pheidippides" (1879), "Never the Time and Place" (1883), "Summum Bonum" (1889), "Epilogue to Asolando" (1889).

Suggestions for Further Reading

The present volume may best be supplemented by the reading of one or more of Browning's longer poems. Of these, *Pippa Passes* will naturally be chosen first, followed by *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, *In a Balcony*, and *Colombe's Birthday*. The two volumes of selections made by Browning himself contain most of his noteworthy shorter poems, down to 1880.

The standard editions of Browning are published by Smith, Elder & Co., — the complete works in seventeen volumes, and Browning's selections in one volume. The complete works are also published in one volume in "The Cambridge Poets" (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.). An American edition of Browning's selections, with notes by Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, is published by Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.

For the biography of Browning the best authorities are the *Life and Letters*, by Mrs. Sutherland Orr (Smith, Elder & Co.); *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Harpers); *Robert Browning, Personalia*, by Edmund Gosse (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.). The life by Professor Edward Dowden (Dent & Co.) is the most satisfactory biography. Short lives by William Sharp and G. K. Chesterton may be found respectively in the Great Writer series (Walter Scott & Co.) and the English Men of Letters series (The Macmillan Company). Two articles by Katherine C. Bronson — "Browning in Asolo," *The Century*, volume 59, and "Browning in Venice," *The Cornhill Magazine*, new series, volume 12 — give interesting accounts of Browning's later years. Of introductions and hand-books to Browning there are many, among which the following may be mentioned:

A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning. Mrs. Sutherland Orr (Bell & Co.).

An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry. Hiram Corson (Heath & Co.).

An Introduction to the Study of Browning. Arthur Symons (Cassell & Co.).

An Introduction to the Poetry of Robert Browning. W. J. Alexander (Ginn & Co.).

The Browning Cyclopaedia. Edward Berdoe (Swan, Sonnenschein & Co.).

The Poetry of Robert Browning. Stopford A. Brooke (Crowell).

Of essays upon aspects of Browning's work it is possible to mention only a few of the more valuable, as follows:

Walter Bagehot: "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning, or pure, ornate, and grotesque art in English Poetry," in *Literary Studies*, Vol. II. (Longmans, Green & Co.).

John Jay Chapman, in *Emerson and other Essays* (Scribners).

Joseph Jacobs, in *Literary Studies* (Nutt).

Hugh Walker, in *The Greater Victorian Poets* (Swan, Sonnenschein & Co.).

E. C. Stedman, in *Victorian Poets.*

Augustine Birrell, "On the Alleged Obscurity in Mr. Browning's Poetry," in *Obiter Dicta*, Vol. I. (Scribners).

"Robert Browning," in *Essays and Addresses* (Scribners).

Edward Dowden, "Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Browning," in *Studies in Literature.*

C. C. Everett, in "Essays Theological and Literary (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.).

Sir Leslie Stephen, "The Browning Letters," in *Studies of a Biographer*, Vol. III. (Duckworth).

G. E. Woodberry, in *Makers of Literature* (Scribners).

SELECTIONS FROM BROWNING

I

CAVALIER TUNES

I

MARCHING ALONG

I

KENTISH Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you 're —

(*Chorus*) *Marching along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

III

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here,

(*Chorus*) *Marching along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

IV

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

(*Chorus*) *March we along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

II

GIVE A ROUSE

I

KING CHARLES, and who 'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell 's despite now,
King Charles!

II

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

(*Chorus*) *King Charles, and who 'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell 's despite now,
King Charles!

III

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

(*Chorus*) *King Charles, and who 'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell 's despite now,
King Charles!

III

BOOT AND SADDLE

I

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray,
(*Chorus*) *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*

II

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you 'd say;
Many 's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay—
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

III

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

IV

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
I 've better counsellors; what counsel they?
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR

[1842]

I

AS I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried,
As I ride, as I ride.

II

As I ride, as I ride
To our Chief and his Allied,
Who dares chide my heart's pride
As I ride, as I ride?
Or are witnesses denied—
Through the desert waste and wide
Do I glide unespied
As I ride, as I ride?

III

As I ride, as I ride,
When an inner voice has cried,
The sands slide, nor abide
(As I ride, as I ride)
O'er each visioned homicide
That came vaunting (has he lied?)
To reside — where he died,
As I ride, as I ride.

IV

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
Yet his hide, streaked and plied,
As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
— Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed —
How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride !

V

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
(As I ride, as I ride)
All that 's meant me — satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I 'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride!

"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX"

[16—]

I

I SPRANG to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III

'T was moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Düffeld, 't was morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So, Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

IV

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

V

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence, — ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris "Stay spur!
Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault 's not in her,
We 'll remember at Aix" — for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

VIII

"How they 'll greet us!" — and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX

Then I cast loose my buff-coat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X

And all I remember is, — friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP

I

YOU know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans
That soar, to earth may fall,
Let once my army-leader Lannes
Waver at yonder wall" —
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

III

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect —
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace
We 've got you Ratisbon!
The Marshal 's in the market-place,
And you 'll be there anon
To see your flag-bird flap his vans
Where I, to heart's desire,
Perched him!" The chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V

The chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes.
"You 're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
"I 'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

A CHILD'S STORY

(*Written for, and inscribed to, W. M. the Younger*)

I

HAMELIN Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

II

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

III

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
"'T is clear," cried they, "our Mayor 's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation — shocking

To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What 's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you 're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we 're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we 'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV

An hour they sat in council;
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder I 'd my ermine gown sell,
I wish I were a mile hence!
It 's easy to bid one rack one 's brain—
I 'm sure my poor head aches again,
I 've scratched it so, and all in vain.
Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber-door but a gentle tap?
"Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what 's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"

V

"Come in!"—the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!

His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith and kin:
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: "It 's as my great-grandsire,
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

VI

He advanced to the council-table:
And, "Please your honors," said he, "I 'm able,
By means of a secret charm, to draw
All creatures living beneath the sun,
That creep or swim or fly or run,
After me so as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole and toad and newt and viper;
And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
"Yet," said he, "poor piper as I am,
In Tartary I freed the Cham,
Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
I eased in Asia the Nizam

Of a monstrous brood of vampire-bats:
And as for what your brain bewilders,
If I can rid your town of rats
Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
"One? fifty thousand!" — was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

VII

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the murmuring grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling:
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives —
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser,
Wherein all plunged and perished!
— Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:

Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
Into a cider-press's gripe:
And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
And a drawing the corks of train-oil flasks,
And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
And it seemed as if a voice
(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
Is breathed) called out, 'Oh rats, rejoice!
The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!
So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!'
And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
All ready staved, like a great sun shone
Glorious scarce an inch before me,
Just as methought it said, 'Come, bore me!'
— I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

VIII

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
"Go," cried the Mayor, "and get long poles,
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!" — when suddenly, up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"

IX

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue:
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;

And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gypsy coat of red and yellow!
"Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
"Our business was done at the river's brink;
We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
So, friend, we 're not the folks to shrink
From the duty of giving you something for drink,
And a matter of money to put in your poke;
But as for the guilders, what we spoke
Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X

The Piper's face fell, and he cried,
"No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
I 've promised to visit by dinner time
Bagdat, and accept the prime
Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he 's rich in,
For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
Of a nest of scorpions no survivor:
With him I proved no bargain-driver,
With you, don't think I 'll bate a stiver!
And folks who put me in a passion
May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI

"How?" cried the Mayor, "d' ye think I brook
Being worse treated than a Cook?
Insulted by a lazy ribald
With idle pipe and vesture piebald?
You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
Blow your pipe there till you burst!"

XII

Once more he stept into the street,
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling;
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
Unable to move a step, or cry
To the children merrily skipping by,
— Could only follow with the eye
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
But how the Mayor was on the rack,
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
As the Piper turned from the High Street
To where the Weser rolled its waters
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
However, he turned from South to West,
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
And after him the children pressed;
Great was the joy in every breast.
"He never can cross that mighty top!

He's forced to let the piping drop,
And we shall see our children stop!"
When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
And when all were in to the very last,
The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
And could not dance the whole of the way;
And in after years, if you would blame
His sadness, he was used to say,—
"It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
I can't forget that I 'm bereft
Of all the pleasant sights they see,
Which the Piper also promised me.
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
Joining the town and just at hand,
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here.
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey-bees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles' wings;
And just as I became assured
My lame foot would be speedily cured,
The music stopped and I stood still,
And found myself outside the hill,
Left alone against my will,
To go now limping as before,
And never hear of that country more!"

XIV

Alas, alas for Hamelin!
There came into many a burgher's pate
A text which says that heaven's gate

Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in!
The Mayor sent East, West, North and South,
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he 'd only return the way he went,
And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 't was a lost endeavor,
And Piper and dancers were gone forever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,
"And so long after what happened here
On the Twenty-second of July,
Thirteen hundred and seventy-six;"
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children's last retreat,
They called it, the Pied Piper's Street—
Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
Was sure for the future to lose his labor.
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
To shock with mirth a street so solemn;
But opposite the place of the cavern
They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.
And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there 's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbors lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison

Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.

XV

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men — especially pipers!
And, whether they pipe us free fróm rats or fróm mice,
If we 've promised them aught, let us keep our promise.

COUNT GISMOND

AIX IN PROVENCE

I

CHRIST God who savest man, save most
Of men Count Gismond who saved me!
Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
Chose time and place and company
To suit it; when he struck at length
My honour, 't was with all his strength.

II

And doubtlessly, ere he could draw
All points to one, he must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
Few half so happy as I seemed,
While being dressed in queen's array
To give our tourney prize away.

III

I thought they loved me, did me grace
To please themselves; 't was all their deed;
God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed
My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
A word, and straight the play had stopped.

IV

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head!

V

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling
A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs —

VI

And come out on the morning troop
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,
And called me queen, and made me stoop
Under the canopy — (a streak
That pierced it, of the outside sun,
Powdered with gold its gloom's soft dun) —

VII

And they could let me take my state
And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
My queen's-day — Oh I think the cause
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

VIII

However that be, all eyes were bent
Upon me, when my cousins cast
Theirs down; 't was time I should present
The victor's crown, but . . . there, 't will last
No long time . . . the old mist again
Blinds me as then it did. How vain!

IX

See ! Gismond 's at the gate, in talk
With his two boys: I can proceed.
Well, at that moment, who should stalk
Forth boldly — to my face, indeed —
But Gauthier ? and he thundered " Stay ! "
And all stayed. " Bring no crowns, I say !

X

" Bring torches ! Wind the penance-sheet
About her ! Let her shun the chaste,
Or lay herself before their feet !
Shall she, whose body I embraced
A night long, queen it in the day ?
For honour's sake no crowns, I say ! "

XI

I ? What I answered ? As I live,
I never fancied such a thing
As answer possible to give.
What says the body when they spring
Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
Strength on it ? No more says the soul.

XII

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan: who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end ?

XIII

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
  Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
  In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead.

XIV

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
  The heart of the joy, with my content
In watching Gismond unalloyed
  By any doubt of the event:
God took that on him — I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

XV

Did I not watch him while he let
  His armourer just brace his greaves,
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
  The while! His foot . . . my memory leaves
No least stamp out, nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on.

XVI

And e'en before the trumpet's sound
  Was finished, prone lay the false knight,
Prone as his lie, upon the ground:
  Gismond flew at him, used no sleight
O' the sword, but open-breasted drove,
Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

XVII

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
And said, " Here die, but end thy breath
In full confession, lest thou fleet
From my first, to God's second death !
Say, hast thou lied ? " And, " I have lied
To God and her," he said, and died.

XVIII

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
— What safe my heart holds, though no word
Could I repeat now, if I tasked
My powers for ever, to a third
Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
Until I sank upon his breast.

XIX

Over my head his arm he flung
Against the world ; and scarce I felt
His sword (that dripped by me and swung)
A little shifted in its belt:
For he began to say the while
How South our home lay many a mile.

XX

So, 'mid the shouting multitude
We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten ! May his soul find grace !

XXI

Our elder boy has got the clear
  Great brow; tho' when his brother's black
Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
  And have you brought my tercel back?
I was just telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

HERVÉ RIEL

I

ON the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety two,
Did the English fight the French, — woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-shelter thro' the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to St. Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II

'T was the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick — or, quicker still,
Here 's the English can and will!"

III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,
Shall the '*Formidable*' here with her twelve and eighty guns
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter where 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,

And with flow at full beside?
Now 't is slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here 's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that 's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech.)
Not a minute more to wait!
"Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V

"Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
— A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate — first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI

And, "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?

Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying 's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there 's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this '*Formidable*' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,
— Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I 've nothing but my life, — here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace!
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,

Keeps the passage as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past,
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!" — sure as fate
Up the English come, too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,

Tho' I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
'Faith our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not Damfreville."

X

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?—
Since 't is ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank

Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank !
You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse !
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle
Aurore !

PHEIDIPPIDES

χαίρετε, νικῶμεν

FIRST I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes, honour to all
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
— Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer,
Now, henceforth and forever, — O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan — patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!
See, 't is myself here standing alive, no spectre that speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,
Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has come.
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;
Razed to the ground is Eretria — but Athens, shall Athens sink,
Drop into dust and die — the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?

PROPERTY 3 1005 5 OF
COLBY SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er
destruction's brink?
How, — when? No care for my limbs! — there 's lightning in
all and some —
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens — Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice, — each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering, — the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch from
dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athene, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye
must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come, — does Athens ask aid, — may Sparta
befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment — too weighty the issue at stake!
Count we no time lost time which lags thro' respect to the
Gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds
In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we — who judgment suspend."

Athens, — except for that sparkle, — thy name, I had mouldered
to ash!
That sent a blaze thro' my blood; off, off and away was I back,
— Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false and the
vile!
Yet "O Gods of my land!" I cried, as each hillock and plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them again,

"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honours we paid you erewhile?
Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation! Too rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay, — I bid you cease to enwreathe
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's foot,
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave!
Rather I hail thee, Parnes, — trust to thy wild waste tract!
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure? — at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!"

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:
"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?
Athens to aid? Tho' the dive were thro' Erebos, thus I obey —
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge
Better!" — when — ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that are?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he — majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof;
All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly — the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.
"Halt, Pheidippides!" — halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious began:
"How is it, — Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?

Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia — so much as strews not the soil — is cast in the sea,
Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!'"
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
— Fennel, — I grasped it a-tremble with dew — whatever it bode),
"While, as for thee . . ." But enough! He was gone. If I ran hitherto —
Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens — earth no more, the air was my road;
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon rare!

Then spoke Miltiades. "And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed, — what gift is promised thyself?
Tell it us straightway, — Athens the mother demands of her son!"
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance — "Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'

" I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow, —
Pound — Pan helping us — Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away forever; and then, — no Athens to save, —
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave, —
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees, — recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full — rewarding him — so!"

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,
Till in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine thro' clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died — the bliss!

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still "Rejoice!" — his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy forever, — the noble strong man
Who could race like a god, bear the face of a god, whom a god loved so well;
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously — once to shout, thereafter be mute:
"Athens is saved!" — Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

MORNING, evening, noon and night,
"Praise God!" sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he laboured, long and well;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever, at each period,
He stopped and sang, "Praise God!"

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, "Well done;
I doubt not thou art heard, my son:

"As well as if thy voice to-day
Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

"This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, "Would God that I
Might praise Him, that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day,

God said in heaven, "Nor day nor night
Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well;

And morning, evening, noon and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew:
The man put off the stripling's hue:

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay:

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

(He did God's will; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, "A praise is in mine ear;
There is no doubt in it, no fear:

"So sing old worlds, and so
New worlds that from my footstool go.

"Clearer loves sound other ways:
I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'T was Easter Day: he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite:

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer:

And rising from the sickness drear,
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

"I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell,
And set thee here; I did not well.

"Vainly I left my angel-sphere,
Vain was thy dream of many a year.

"Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped —
Creation's chorus stopped!

"Go back and praise again
The early way, while I remain.

"With that weak voice of our disdain,
Take up creation's pausing strain.

"Back to the cell and poor employ:
Resume the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.

One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side.

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"

(*See Edgar's song in "Lear"*)

I

MY first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring, —
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

V

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside, ("since all is o'er," he saith,
"And the blow fallen no grieving can amend;")

VI

While some discuss if near the other graves
Be room enough for this, and when a day
Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and staves:
And still the man hears all, and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and stay.

VII

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among "The Band" — to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps — that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now — should I be fit?

VIII

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
O'er the safe road, 't was gone; gray plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on; naught else remained to do.

X

So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
For flowers — as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You 'd think; a burr had been a treasure trove.

XI

No! penury, inertness and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See
Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,
"It nothing skills: I can not help my case:
'T is the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place,
Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

XII

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to balk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there:
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

XIV

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
I never saw a brute I hated so;
He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards — the soldier's art:
One taste of the old time sets all to rights.

XVI

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!
Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour — there he stands
Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
Good — but the scene shifts — faugh! what hangman hands
Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;
Back therefore to my darkening path again!
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
I asked: when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof — to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes

XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

XXI

Which, while I forded, — good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
— It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a plash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage —

XXIII

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
What penned them there, with all the plain to choose?
No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV

And more than that — a furlong on — why, there!
What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
Or brake, not wheel — that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

XXV

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes!) within a rood —
Bog, clay, and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

XXVI

Now blotches rankling, colored gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end,
Naught in the distance but the evening, naught
To point my footstep further! At the thought,
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap — perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains — with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
How thus they had surprised me, — solve it, you!
How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when —
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts — you 're inside the den.

XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! those two hills on the right,
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight,
While, to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight!

XXXI

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII

Not see? because of night perhaps? — why, day
Came back again for that! before it left,
The dying sunset kindled thro' a cleft:
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay, —
"Now stab and end the creature — to the heft!"

XXXIII

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it toiled
Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
Of all the lost adventurers my peers, —
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
And such was fortunate, yet each of old
Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"

II

HOME-THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

OH, to be in England now that April 's there,
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England — now!
And after April, when May follows
And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops — at the bent spray's edge —
That 's the wise thrush: he sings each song twice over
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And, tho' the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
— Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

HOME-THOUGHTS FROM THE SEA

NOBLY, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the Northwest died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
In the dimmest Northeast distance dawned Gibraltar grand and gray;
"Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?"—say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

SONG FROM "PARACELSUS"

I

HEAP cassia, sandal-buds and stripes
Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,
Smeared with dull nard an Indian wipes
From out her hair: such balsam falls
Down sea-side mountain pedestals,
From tree-tops where tired winds are fain,
Spent with the vast and howling main,
To treasure half their island gain.

II

And strew faint sweetness from some old
Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
Or shredded perfume, like a cloud
From closet long to quiet vowed,
With mothed and dropping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among,
As when a queen, long dead, was young.

"DE GUSTIBUS—"

I

YOUR ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
(If our loves remain)
In an English lane,
By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.
Hark, those two in the hazel coppice —
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,
Making love, say, —
The happier they!
Draw yourself up from the light of the moon.
And let them pass as they will too soon,
With the beanflower's boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June!

II

What I love best in all the world
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.
Or look for me, old fellow of mine,
(If I get my head from out the mouth
O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,
And come again to the land of lands)—
In a sea-side house to the farther South,
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,
And one sharp tree -- 't is a cypress — stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. For, what expands

Before the house, but the great opaque
Blue breadth of sea without a break?
While, in the house, for ever crumbles
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles
Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,
And says there 's news to-day — the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling:
— She hopes they have not caught the felons
Italy, my Italy!
Queen Mary's saying serves for me —
(When fortune's malice
Lost her, Calais)
Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, "Italy."
Such lovers old are I and she:
So it always was, so shall ever be!

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

PIANO DI SORRENTO

FORTÙ, Fortù, my beloved one, sit here by my side,
On my knees put up both little feet! I was sure, if I tried,
I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco. Now, open your eyes,
Let me keep you amused, till he vanish in black from the skies,
With telling my memories over, as you tell your beads;
All the Plain saw me gather, I garland — the flowers or the weeds.
Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn had networked with brown
The white skin of each grape on the bunches, marked like a quail's crown,
Those creatures you make such account of, whose heads, — speckled white
Over brown like a great spider's back, as I told you last night, —
Your mother bites off for her supper. Red-ripe as could be,
Pomegranates were chapping and splitting in halves on the tree.
And betwixt the loose walls of great flintstone, or in the thick dust
On the path, or straight out of the rock-side, wherever could thrust
Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower its yellow face up,
For the prize were great butterflies fighting, some five for one cup.
So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning, what change was in store,
By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets which woke me before

I could open my shutter, made fast with a bough and a stone,
And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs, sole lattice that 's known.
Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles, while, busy beneath,
Your priest and his brother tugged at them, the rain in their teeth.
And out upon all the flat house-roofs, where split figs lay drying,
The girls took the frails under cover: nor use seemed in trying
To get out the boats and go fishing, for, under the cliff,
Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock. No seeing our skiff
Arrive about noon from Amalfi! — our fisher arrive,
And pitch down his basket before us, all trembling alive
With pink and gray jellies, your sea-fruit; you touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at, while round him like imps
Cling screaming the children as naked and brown as his shrimps;
Himself too as bare to the middle — you see round his neck
The string and its brass coin suspended, that saves him from wreck.
But to-day not a boat reached Salerno: so back, to a man,
Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards grape-harvest began.
In the vat, halfway up in our house-side, like blood the juice spins,
While your brother all bare-legged is dancing till breathless he grins
Dead-beaten in effort on effort to keep the grapes under,
Since still, when he seems all but master, in pours the fresh plunder
From girls who keep coming and going with basket on shoulder,
And eyes shut against the rain's driving; your girls that are older, —
For under the hedges of aloe, and where, on its bed
Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple lies pulpy and red,

All the young ones are kneeling and filling their laps with the snails
Tempted out by this first rainy weather, — your best of regales,
As to-night will be proved to my sorrow, when, supping in state,
We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen, three over one plate)
With lasagne so tempting to swallow in slippery ropes,
And gourds fried in great purple slices, that colour of popes.
Meantime, see the grape bunch they 've brought you : the rain-water slips
O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe which the wasp to your lips
Still follows with fretful persistence. Nay, taste, while awake,
This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball that peels, flake by flake,
Like an onion, each smoother and whiter : next, sip this weak wine
From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper, a leaf of the vine;
And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh that leaves thro' its juice
The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth.
Scirocco is loose !
Hark, the quick, whistling pelt of the olives which, thick in one's track,
Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them, tho' not yet half black !
How the old twisted olive trunks shudder, the medlars let fall
Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees snap off, figs and all,
For here comes the whole of the tempest ! no refuge, but creep
Back again to my side and my shoulder, and listen or sleep.

O how will your country show next week, when all the vine-boughs
Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture the mules and the cows ?

Last eve, I rode over the mountains; your brother, my guide,
Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles that offered, each side,
Their fruit-balls, black, glossy, and luscious, — or strip from the sorbs
A treasure, or, rosy and wondrous, those hairy gold orbs!
But my mule picked his sure sober path out, just stopping to neigh
When he recognized down in the valley his mates on their way
With the faggots and barrels of water. And soon we emerged
From the plain where the woods could scarce follow; and still, as we urged
Our way, the woods wondered, and left us, as up still we trudged,
Tho' the wild paths grew wilder each instant, and place was e'en grudged
'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones like the loose broken teeth
Of some monster which climbed there to die, from the ocean beneath —
Place was grudged to the silver-gray fume-weed that clung to the path,
And dark rosemary ever a-dying, that, 'spite the wind's wrath,
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward, and lentisks as stanch
To the stone where they root and bear berries: and . . . what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets of pale seagreen leaves;
Over all trod my mule with the caution of gleaners o'er sheaves.
Still, foot after foot like a lady, till, round after round,
He climbed to the top of Calvano: and God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains, and under, the sea,
And within me my heart to bear witness what was and shall be.
Oh, heaven and the terrible crystal! no rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived in the blue solitudes.
Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement! still moving with you;
For, ever some new head and breast of them thrusts into view
To observe the intruder; you see it if quickly you turn
And, before they escape you, surprise them. They grudge you should learn

How the soft plains they look on, lean over and love (they pretend)
— Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches, the wild fruit-trees bend,
E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut: all is silent and grave:
'T is a sensual and timorous beauty, — how fair! but a slave.
So, I turned to the sea; and there slumbered, as greenly as ever,
Those isles of the siren, your Galli. No ages can sever
The Three, nor enable their sister to join them, — halfway
On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses — no farther to-day!
Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave, watches breast-high and steady
From under the rock her bold sister, swum halfway already.
Fortù, shall we sail there together, and see, from the sides,
Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts where the siren abides?
Shall we sail round and round them, close over the rocks, tho' unseen,
That ruffle the gray glassy water to glorious green?
Then scramble from splinter to splinter, reach land, and explore,
On the largest, the strange square black turret with never a door,
Just a loop to admit the quick lizards; then, stand there and hear
The birds' quiet singing, that tells us what life is, so clear?
— The secret they sang to Ulysses when, ages ago,
He heard and he knew this life's secret I hear and I know.

Ah, see! The sun breaks o'er Calvano; he strikes the great gloom
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit in airy gold fume.
All is over. Look out, see the gipsy, our tinker and smith,
Has arrived, set up bellows and forge, and down-squatted forthwith
To his hammering under the wall there; one eye keeps aloof
The urchins that itch to be putting his jews'-harps to proof,

While the other, thro' locks of curled wire, is watching how sleek
Shines the hog, come to share in the windfall. — Chew, abbot's own cheek!
All is over. Wake up and come out now, and down let us go,
And see the fine things got in order at church for the show
Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening. To-morrow's the Feast
Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means of Virgins the least,
As you 'll hear in the off-hand discourse which (all nature, no art)
The Dominican brother, these three weeks, was getting by heart.
Not a pillar nor post but is dizened with red and blue papers;
All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar a-blaze with long tapers.
But the great masterpiece is the scaffold rigged glorious to hold
All the fiddlers and fifers and drummers and trumpeters bold
Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber, who, when the priest 's hoarse,
Will strike us up something that 's brisk for the feast's second course.
And then will the flaxen-wigged Image be carried in pomp
Thro' the plain, while, in gallant procession, the priests mean to stomp.
All round the glad church lie old bottles with gunpowder stopped,
Which will be, when the Image re-enters, religiously popped.
And at night from the crest of Calvano great bonfires will hang:
On the plain will the trumpets join chorus, and more poppers bang.
At all events, come — to the garden as far as the wall;
See me tap with a hoe on the plaster, till out there shall fall
A scorpion with wide angry nippers!

— "Such trifles!" you say?
Fortù, in my England at home, men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws be righteous and wise!
— If 't were proper, Scirocco should vanish in black from the skies!

UP AT A VILLA — DOWN IN THE CITY

(*As Distinguished by an Italian Person of Quality*)

I

HAD I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

II

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!
There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;
While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a beast.

III

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!
— I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair 's turned wool.

IV

But the city, oh the city — the square with the houses! Why?
They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there 's something to take the eye!
Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry;
You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who hurries by!
Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the sun gets high;
And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted properly.

V

What of a villa? Tho' winter be over in March by rights,
'T is May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off the heights:
You 've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen steam and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint gray olive-trees.

VI

Is it better in May, I ask you? You 've summer all at once;
In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers well,
The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

VII

Is it ever hot in the square? There 's a fountain to spout and splash!
In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine such foam-bows flash
On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle and pash
Round the lady atop in her conch — fifty gazers do not abash,
Tho' all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in a sort of sash.

VIII

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,
Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.
Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix i' the corn and mingle,
Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.

Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is shrill,
And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous firs on the hill.
Enough of the seasons, — I spare you the months of the fever and chill.

IX

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells begin:
No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:
You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin.
By and by there 's the traveling doctor gives pills, lets blood, draws teeth:
Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.
At the post-office such a scene-picture — the new play, piping hot!
And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves were shot.
Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes,
And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new law of the Duke's!
Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don So-and-so
Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, St. Jerome and Cicero,
"And moreover," (the sonnet goes rhyming,) "the skirts of St. Paul has reached,
Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous than ever he preached."
Noon strikes, — here sweeps the procession! our Lady borne smiling and smart,
With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords stuck in her heart!
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife;
No keeping one's haunches still: it 's the greatest pleasure in life.

X

But bless you, it 's dear — it 's dear! fowls, wine, at double the rate.
They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays passing the gate

It 's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not the city!
Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still — ah, the pity, the pity!
Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls and sandals,
And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding the yellow candles;
One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with handles,
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals:
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.
Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

III

SONG

I

NAY but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
Holds earth aught — speak truth — above her?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

II

Because, you spend your lives in praising;
To praise, you search the wide world over:
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught — speak truth — above her?
Above this tress, and this, I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much!

SONGS FROM "PIPPA PASSES"

I

THE year 's at the spring,
And day 's at the morn;
Morning 's at seven;
The hill-side 's dew-pearled;
The lark 's on the wing;
The snail 's on the thorn;
God 's in His heaven —
All 's right with the world!

II

1

GIVE her but a least excuse to love me!
When — where —
How — can this arm establish her above me,
If fortune fixed her as my lady there,
There already, to eternally reprove me?
("Hist!" — said Kate the queen;
But "Oh," cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'T is only a page that carols unseen,
Crumbling your hounds their messes!")

2

Is she wronged? — To the rescue of her honour,
My heart!
Is she poor? — What costs it to be styled a donor
Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.

But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!
("Nay, list!" — bade Kate the queen;
And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'T is only a page that carols unseen,
Fitting your hawks their jesses!")

III

You 'll love me yet! — and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April's sowing.

I plant a heartfull now: some seed
At least is sure to strike,
And yield — what you 'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, may be, like.

You 'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look? — that pays a thousand pains.
What 's death? You 'll love me yet!

LOVE IN A LIFE

I

ROOM after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her —
Next time, herself! — not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew;
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

II

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune —
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest, — who cares?
But 't is twilight, you see, — with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

LIFE IN A LOVE

ESCAPE me?
Never —
Beloved!
While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear:
It seems too much like a fate, indeed!
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.
But what if I fail of my purpose here?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, get up and begin again, —
So the chace takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound
At me so deep in the dust and dark,
No sooner the old hope goes to ground
Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
I shape me —
Ever
Removed!

MY STAR

ALL that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that darties the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird: like a flower, hangs furled:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

MEETING AT NIGHT

I

THE gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

PARTING AT MORNING

ROUND the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

SUMMUM BONUM

ALL the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine, — wonder, wealth, and
— how far above them —
Truth, that 's brighter than gem,
Trust, that 's purer than pearl, —
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe — all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE

NEVER the time and the place
And the loved one all together!
This path — how soft to pace!
This May — what magic weather!
Where is the loved one's face?
In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy sly and serpentine,
Uncoil thee from the waking man!
Do I hold the Past
Thus firm and fast
Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?
This path so soft to pace shall lead
Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed!
Or narrow if needs the house must be,
Outside are the storms and strangers: we —
Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
— I and she!

SONGS FROM "JAMES LEE'S WIFE."

III

IN THE DOORWAY

I

THE swallow has set her six young on the rail,
And looks seaward:
The water 's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale
To the leeward, —
On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind.
"Good fortune departs, and disaster 's behind,"
Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail!

II

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furled
Her five fingers,
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world
Where there lingers
No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake:
How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on its stake!
My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

III

Yet here are we two; we have love, house enough,
With the field there,
This house of four rooms, that field red and rough,
Tho' it yield there,
For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a bent;
If a magpie alight now, it seems an event;
And they both will be gone at November's rebuff.

IV

But why must cold spread? but wherefore bring change
To the spirit,
God meant should mate his with an infinite range,
And inherit
His power to put life in the darkness and cold?
Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be bold!
Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter estrange!

V

ON THE CLIFF

I

I LEANED on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf;
For the turf, to call it grass were to mock:
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

II

And the rock lay flat
As an anvil's face:
No iron like that!
Baked dry: of a weed, of a shell, no trace:
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
Death's altar by the lone shore.

III

On the turf, sprang gay
With his films of blue,
No cricket, I 'll say,
But a war-horse, barded and chanfroned too.
The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
Real fairy, with wings all right.

IV

On the rock, they scorch
Like a drop of fire
From a brandished torch,
Fall two red fans of a butterfly:
No turf, no rock, — in their ugly stead,
See, wonderful blue and red!

V

Is it not so
With the minds of men?
The level and low,
The burnt and bare, in themselves; but then
With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,
Love settling unawares!

III

I

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth:
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

II

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you.
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

MISCONCEPTIONS

I

THIS is a spray the Bird clung to,
Making it blossom with pleasure,
Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,
Fit for her nest and her treasure
Oh, what a hope beyond measure
Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to, —
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

II

This is a heart the Queen leant on,
Thrilled in a minute erratic,
Ere the true bosom she bent on,
Meet for love's regal dalmatic.
Oh, what a fancy ecstatic
Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went on, —
Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent on!

THE LOST MISTRESS

I

ALL 'S over, then: does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes?
Hark, 't is the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

II

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
I noticed that, to-day;
One day more bursts them open fully:
You know the red turns gray.

III

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we, — well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign:

IV

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,
Tho' I keep with heart's endeavour, —
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Tho' it stay in my soul for ever! —

V

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!

ONE WAY OF LOVE

I

ALL June I bound the rose in sheaves.
Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves
And strew them where Pauline may pass.
She will not turn aside? Alas!
Let them lie. Suppose they die?
The chance was they might take her eye.

II

How many a month I strove to suit
These stubborn fingers to the lute!
To-day I venture all I know.
She will not hear my music? So!
Break the string; fold music's wing:
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

III

My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion — heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'T is well!
Lose who may — I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!

IN THREE DAYS

I

SO, I shall see her in three days
And just one night, but nights are short,
Then two long hours, and that is morn.
See how I come, unchanged, unworn!
Feel, where my life broke off from thine
How fresh the splinters keep and fine, —
Only a touch and we combine!

II

Too long, this time of year, the days!
But nights, at least the nights are short.
As night shows where her one moon is,
A hand's breadth of pure light and bliss,
So life's night gives my lady birth
And my eyes hold her! What is worth
The rest of heaven, the rest of earth?

III

O loaded curls, release your store
Of warmth and scent, as once before
The tingling hair did, lights and darks
Outbreaking into fairy sparks,
When under curl and curl I pried
After the warmth and scent inside,
Thro' lights and darks how manifold —
The dark inspired, the light controlled,
As early Art embrowns the gold!

IV

What great fear, should one say, "Three days,
That change the world might change as well
Your fortune; and if joy delays,
Be happy that no worse befell!"
What small fear, if another says,
"Three days and one short night beside
May throw no shadow on your ways;
But years must teem with change untried.
With chance not easily defied,
With an end somewhere undescried."
No fear!—or, if a fear be born
This minute, it dies out in scorn.
Fear? I shall see her in three days
And one night, now the nights are short,
Then just two hours, and that is morn!

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

I

I KNOW a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives
First, when he visits, last, too, when he leaves
The world; and, vainly favoured, it repays
The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze
By no change of its large calm front of snow.
And, underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,
He can not have perceived, that changes ever
At his approach; and, in the lost endeavour
To live his life, has parted, one by one,
With all a flower's true graces, for the grace
Of being but a foolish mimic sun,
With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.
Men nobly call by many a name the Mount
As over many a land of theirs its large
Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe
Is reared, and still with old names, fresh names vie,
Each to its proper praise and own account:
Men call the Flower, the Sunflower, sportively.

II

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look
Across the waters to this twilight nook,
— The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook!

III

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed?
Go! — saying ever as thou dost proceed,
That I, French Rudel, choose for my device
A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice

Before its idol. See! These inexpert
And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt
The woven picture; 't is a woman's skill
Indeed; but nothing baffled me, so, ill
Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed
On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees
On my flower's breast as on a platform broad:
But, as the flower's concern is not for these
But solely for the sun, so men applaud
In vain this Rudel, he not looking here
But to the East — the East! Go, say this, Pilgrim dear!

EVELYN HOPE

I

BEAUTIFUL Evelyn Hope is dead!
Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass;
Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

II

Sixteen years old when she died!
Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;
It was not her time to love; beside,
Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
Made you of spirit, fire and dew—
And, just because I was thrice as old
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was naught to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, naught beside?

IV

No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Thro' worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V

But the time will come, at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red —
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

VII

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while!
My heart seemed full as it could hold;
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.

So hush, — I will give you this leaf to keep:
  See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
  You will wake, and remember, and understand.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

I

I SAID — Then, dearest, since 't is so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
Since this was written and needs must be —
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave, — I claim
Only a memory of the same,
— And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
Who knows but the world may end to-night?

III

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions — sun's

And moon's and evening star's at once —
And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here! —
Thus leant she and lingered — joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought, — All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

VI

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There 's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

VII

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'T is something, nay 't is much: but then,
Have you yourself what 's best for men?
Are you — poor, sick, old ere your time —
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding 's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII

And you, great sculptor — so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that 's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown gray
With notes and nothing else to say,

Is this your sole praise from a friend,
" Greatly his opera's strains intend,
But in music we know how fashions end!"
I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

IX

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being — had I signed the bond —
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X

And yet — she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity, —
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA

I

THAT was I, you heard last night,
When there rose no moon at all,
Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
Tent of heaven, a planet small:
Life was dead, and so was light.

II

Not a twinkle from the fly,
Not a glimmer from the worm;
When the crickets stopped their cry,
When the owls forbore a term,
You heard music; that was I.

III

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
Sultrily suspired for proof:
In at heaven and out again,
Lightning! — where it broke the roof,
Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

IV

What they could my words expressed,
O my love, my all, my one!
Singing helped the verses best,
And when singing's best was done,
To my lute I left the rest.

V

So wore night; the East was gray,
White the broad-faced hemlock flowers:
There would be another day;
Ere its first of heavy hours
Found me, I had passed away.

VI

What became of all the hopes,
Words and song and lute as well?
Say, this struck you: "When life gropes
Feebly for the path where fell
Light last on the evening slopes, —

VII

"One friend in that path shall be,
To secure my step from wrong;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long,
Serving most with none to see."

VIII

Never say — as something bodes —
"So, the worst has yet a worse!
When life halts 'neath double loads,
Better the task-master's curse
Than such music on the roads!

IX

"When no moon succeeds the sun,
Nor can pierce the midnight's tent
Any star, the smallest one,
While some drops, where lightning rent,
Show the final storm begun —

X

"When the fire-fly hides its spot,
When the garden-voices fail
In the darkness thick and hot,—
Shall another voice avail,
That shape be where these are not?

XI

"Has some plague a longer lease,
Proffering its help uncouth?
Can't one even die in peace?
As one shuts one's eyes on youth,
Is that face the last one sees?"

XII

Oh how dark your villa was,
Windows fast and obdurate!
How the garden grudged me grass
Where I stood — the iron gate
Ground its teeth to let me pass!

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

I

I WONDER do you feel to-day
As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better thro' the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

II

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

III

Help me to hold it! First it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

IV

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles, — blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal: and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope,
I traced it. Hold it fast!

V

The champaign with its endless fleece
  Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
  An everlasting wash of air —
Rome's ghost since her decease.

VI

Such life here, thro' such lengths of hours,
  Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
  Such letting nature have her way
While heaven looks from its towers!

VII

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
  Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
  How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

VIII

I would that you were all to me,
  You that are just so much, no more.
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
  Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?

IX

I would I could adopt your will,
  See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
  At your soul's springs, — your part my part
In life, for good and ill.

X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
  Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth, — I pluck the rose
  And love it more than tongue can speak —
Then the good minute goes.

XI

Already how am I so far
  Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
  Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
  Where is the thread now? Off again.
The old trick! Only I discern —
  Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

BY THE FIRESIDE

I

HOW well I know what I mean to do
When the long dark autumn evenings come:
And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue?
With the music of all thy voices, dumb
In life's November too!

II

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,
O'er a great wise book, as beseemeth age;
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows,
And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose!

III

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
"There he is at it, deep in Greek:
Now then, or never, out we slip
To cut from the hazels by the creek
A mainmast for our ship!"

IV

I shall be at it indeed, my friends!
Greek puts already on either side
Such a branch-work forth as soon extends
To a vista opening far and wide,
And I pass out where it ends.

V

The outside-frame, like your hazel-trees —
But the inside-archway widens fast,
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
And we slope to Italy at last
And youth, by green degrees.

VI

I follow wherever I am led,
Knowing so well the leader's hand:
Oh woman-country, wooed not wed,
Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
Laid to their hearts instead!

VII

Look at the ruined chapel again
Half-way up in the Alpine gorge!
Is that a tower, I point you plain,
Or is it a mill, or an iron-forge
Breaks solitude in vain?

VIII

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
The thread of water single and slim,
Thro' the ravage some torrent brings!

IX

Does it feed the little lake below?
That speck of white just on its marge
Is Pella; see, in the evening-glow,
How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets heaven in snow!

X

On our other side is the straight-up rock;
And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
By boulder-stones where lichens mock
The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block.

XI

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
And thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!
For the drop of the woodland fruit 's begun,
These early November hours,

XII

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needled mat of moss,

XIII

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
Last evening — nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
Where a freaked fawn-coloured flaky crew
Of toad-stools peep indulged.

XIV

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
That takes the turn to a range beyond,
Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge,
Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
Danced over by the midge.

XV

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
Blackish-gray and mostly wet;
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
See here again, how the lichens fret
And the roots of the ivy strike!

XVI

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams —

XVII

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
Or climb from the hemp-dresser's low shed,
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

XVIII

It has some pretension too, this front,
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
Set over the porch, Art's early wont:
'T is John in the Desert, I surmise,
But has borne the weather's brunt —

XIX

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
For a pent-house properly projects
Where three carved beams make a certain show,
Dating — good thought of our architect's —
Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

XX

And all day long a bird sings there,
  And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times;
The place is silent and aware;
  It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.

XXI

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
  Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,
  With whom besides should I dare pursue
The path gray heads abhor?

XXII

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them;
  Youth, flowery all the way, there stops —
Not they; age threatens and they contemn,
  Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
One inch from life's safe hem!

XXIII

With me, youth led . . . I will speak now,
  No longer watch you as you sit
Reading by firelight, that great brow
  And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Mutely, my heart knows how —

XXIV

When, if I think but deep enough,
  You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme;
And you, too, find without rebuff
  Response your soul seeks many a time,
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff.

XXV

My own, confirm me! If I tread
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that, by its side,
Youth seems the waste instead?

XXVI

My own, see where the years conduct!
At first, 't was something our two souls
Should mix as mists do; each is sucked
In each now: on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct.

XXVII

Think, when our one soul understands
The great Word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

XXVIII

Oh I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the divine!

XXIX

But who could have expected this
When we two drew together first
Just for the obvious human bliss,
To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss?

XXX

Come back with me to the first of all,
Let us lean and love it over again,
Let us now forget and now recall,
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall!

XXXI

What did I say? — that a small bird sings
All day long, save when a brown pair
Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
Strained to a bell: 'gainst noon-day glare
You count the streaks and rings.

XXXII

But at afternoon or almost eve
'T is better; then the silence grows
To that degree, you half believe
It must get rid of what it knows,
Its bosom does so heave.

XXXIII

Hither we walked then, side by side,
Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
And still I questioned or replied,
While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
Lay choking in its pride.

XXXIV

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,
And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
And care about the fresco's loss,
And wish for our souls a like retreat,
And wonder at the moss.

XXXV

Stoop and kneel on the settle under,
Look through the window's grated square:
Nothing to see! For fear of plunder,
The cross is down and the altar bare,
As if thieves don't fear thunder.

XXXVI

We stoop and look in through the grate,
See the little porch and rustic door,
Read duly the dead builder's date;
Then cross the bridge that we crossed before,
Take the path again — but wait!

XXXVII

Oh moment one and infinite!
The water slips o'er stock and stone;
The West is tender, hardly bright:
How gray at once is the evening grown —
One star, its chrysolite!

XXXVIII

We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well:
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

XXXIX

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!

XL

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her:
I could fix her face with a guard between,
And find her soul as when friends confer,
Friends — lovers that might have been.

XLI

For my heart had a touch of the woodland time,
Wanting to sleep now over its best.
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,
But bring to the last leaf no such test!
"Hold the last fast!" runs the rhyme.

XLII

For a chance to make your little much,
To gain a lover and lose a friend,
Venture the tree and a myriad such,
When nothing you mar but the year can mend:
But a last leaf — fear to touch!

XLIII

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddying down till it find your face
At some slight wind — best chance of all!
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
You trembled to forestall!

XLIV

Worth how well, those dark gray eyes,
That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonize,
And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize!

XLV

You might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

XLVI

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word.
If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
One near one is too far.

XLVII

A moment after, and hands unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast;
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life: we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

XLVIII

The forests had done it; there they stood;
We caught for a moment the powers at play:
They had mingled us so, for once and good,
Their work was done — we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

XLIX

How the world is made for each of us!
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,
When a soul declares itself — to wit,
By its fruit, the thing it does!

L

Be hate that fruit or love that fruit,
  It forwards the general deed of man:
And each of the Many helps to recruit
  The life of the race by a general plan;
Each living his own, to boot.

LI

I am named and know by that moment's feat;
  There took my station and degree;
So grew my own small life complete,
  As nature obtained her best of me —
One born to love you, sweet!

LII

And to watch you sink by the fireside now
  Back again, as you mutely sit
Musing by firelight, that great brow
  And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Yonder, my heart knows how!

LIII

So, earth has gained by one man the more,
  And the gain of earth must be heaven's gain too:
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
  When autumn comes: which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

ONE WORD MORE

TO E. B. B.

(London, September, 1855)

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas:
These, the world might view — but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her lifetime?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving —
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas —

Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that 's left with lilies in the Louvre —
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the treasure!"
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence) —
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel, —
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he — "Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet — "Then I stopped my painting."

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not? — than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those "people of importance:"
We and Bice bear the loss forever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient —
Using nature that 's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry, —
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem, —
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked — "Shall smiting help us?"
When they drank and sneered — "A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,

Throwing him for thanks — "But drought was pleasant."
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savors of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness — the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude —
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel —
"Egypt's flesh-pots — nay, the drought was better."

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;

Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us —
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows through bronze, may breathe through silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth, — the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
I am mine and yours — the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland, or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with color,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house-roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there 's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('t is the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman —
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats — him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal —
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.

Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure — the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you — yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you —
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song — and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel — borne, see, on my bosom!

O LYRIC LOVE

O LYRIC Love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire, —
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face, —
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart —
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory — to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die, —
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand —
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
— Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on, — so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

IV

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY

I

IT was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

II

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, "Good folk, mere noise repels —
But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
They had answered "And afterward, what else?"

III

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Naught man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV

There 's nobody on the house-tops now —
Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate — or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

V

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

VI

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
"Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
"Me?" — God might question; now instead,
'T is God shall repay: I am safer so.

THE LOST LEADER

I

JUST for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat —
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others, she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags — were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us, — they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II

We shall march prospering, — not thro' his presence,
Songs may inspirit us, — not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done, — while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more devil's-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,

Forced praise on our part — the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him — strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

MY LAST DUCHESS

FERRARA

THAT 'S my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design: for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart — how shall I say? — too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked what e'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace — all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, — good! but thanked
Somehow — I know not how — as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech — (which I have not) — to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark" — and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
— E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We 'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we 'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH

ROME, 15—.

VANITY, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews — sons mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well —
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What 's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world 's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
— Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam 's sure to lurk:
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,

With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
— Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
Draw close: that conflagration of my church
— What then? So much was saved if aught were missed!
My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I! . . .
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
Did I say, basalt for my slab, sons? Black —
'T was ever antique-black I meant! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope

To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
Nay, boys, ye love me — all of jasper, then!
'T is jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There 's plenty jasper somewhere in the world —
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
— That 's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line —
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
And then how I shall lie thro' centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
— Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope

My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze.
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death — ye wish it — God, ye wish it! Stone —
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through —
And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
— Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers —
Old Gandolf at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

I

OH Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But altho' I take your meaning, 't is with such a heavy mind!

II

Here you come with your old music, and here 's all the good it brings.
What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings.
Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

III

Ay, because the sea 's the street there; and 't is arched by . . . what you call
. . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the carnival:
I was never out of England — it 's as if I saw it all.

IV

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May?
Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say?

V

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red, —
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,
O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head?

VI

Well, and it was graceful of them: they'd break talk off and afford
— She, to bite her mask's black velvet — he, to finger on his sword,
While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord?

VII

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions — "Must we die?"
Those commiserating sevenths — "Life might last! we can but try!"

VIII

"Were you happy?" — "Yes." — "And are you still as happy?" — "Yes. And you?"
— "Then, more kisses!" — "Did *I* stop them, when a million seemed so few?"
Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!

IX

So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare say!
"Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!
I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!"

X

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time, one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone,
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the sun.

XI

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor swerve,
While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close reserve,
In you come with your cold music till I creep thro' every nerve.

XII

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:
"Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned.
The soul, doubtless, is immortal — where a soul can be discerned.

XIII

"Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,
Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;
Butterflies may dread extinction, — you'll not die, it can not be!

XIV

"As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop:
What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?

XV

"Dust and ashes!" So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
Dear dead women, with such hair, too — what 's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

(*Called "the Faultless Painter"*)

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia! bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I 'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
Oh, I 'll content him, — but to-morrow, Love!
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual: and it seems
As if — forgive now — should you let me sit
Here by the window, with your hand in mine,
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so —
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
— How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet —

My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks — no one 's: very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there 's my picture ready made,
There 's what we painters call our harmony!
A common grayness silvers everything, —
All in a twilight, you and I alike
— You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That 's gone, you know) — but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There 's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape,
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead:
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example — turn your head —
All that 's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak:
And that cartoon, the second from the door
— It is the thing, Love! so such things should be —
Behold Madonna! — I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep —
Do easily, too — when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week;
And just as much they used to say in France.

At any rate 't is easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that 's long past:
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
— Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive — you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat, —
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter) — so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that 's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Tho' they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word —
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what 's a heaven for? All is silver-gray,
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.
Yonder 's a work now, of that famous youth

The Urbinate who died five years ago.
('T is copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and thro' his art — for it gives way,
That arm is wrongly put — and there again —
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak; its soul is right,
He means right — that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch —
Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think —
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you — oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that?
Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems:
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, can not, I perceive:
Yet the will 's somewhat — somewhat, too, the power
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'T is safer for me, if the award be strict,

That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look, —
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts, —
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This, in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward!
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
And had you not grown restless . . . but I know —
'T is done and past; 't was right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not gray:
And I 'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was — to reach and stay there; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife —"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge

Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
" Friend, there 's a certain sorry little scrub
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
Who, were he set to plan and execute
As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours ! "
To Rafael's ! — And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here — quick, thus the line should go !
Ay, but the soul ! he 's Rafael ! rub it out !
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he ? why, who but Michel Agnolo ?
Do you forget already words like those ?)
If really there was such a chance so lost, —
Is, whether you 're — not grateful — but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed !
This hour has been an hour ! Another smile ?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend ?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now ; there 's a star ;
Morello 's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love, — come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me : oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with !

Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you — you, and not with me? Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work 's my ware, and what 's it worth?
I 'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The gray remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more — the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them — that is, Michel Agnolo —
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor.
Finish the portrait out of hand — there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What 's better and what 's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis! — it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
And I have laboured somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son

Paint my two hundred pictures — let him try!
No doubt, there 's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance —
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover — the three first without a wife,
While I have mine! So — still they overcome
Because there 's still Lucrezia, — as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

(*Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe*)

LET us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes,
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
Cared-for till cock-crow:
Look out if yonder be not day again
Rimming the rock-row!
That 's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,
Rarer, intenser,
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
Chafes in the censer.
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture!
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
Clouds overcome it;
No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit.
Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's:
He 's for the morning.
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
'Ware the beholders!
This is our master, famous, calm and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd ! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft
Safe from the weather !
He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
Singing together,
He was a man born with thy face and throat,
Lyric Apollo !
Long he lived nameless : how should spring take note
Winter would follow ?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone !
Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, " New measures, other feet anon !
My dance is finished ? "
No, that 's the world's way ; (keep the mountain-side,
Make for the city !)
He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
Over men's pity;
Left play for work, and grappled with the world
Bent on escaping :
" What 's in the scroll," quoth he, " thou keepest furled ?
Show me their shaping,
Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage, —
Give ! " — So, he gowned him,
Straight got by heart that book to its last page :
Learned, we found him.
Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain ;
" Time to taste life," another would have said,
" Up with the curtain ! "
This man said rather, " Actual life comes next ?
Patience a moment !
Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
Still there 's the comment.
Let me know all ! Prate not of most or least,
Painful or easy !
Even to the crumbs I 'd fain eat up the feast,
Ay, nor feel queasy."
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,

When he had gathered all books had to give!
Sooner, he spurned it,
Image the whole, then execute the parts —
Fancy the fabric
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick!
(Here 's the town-gate reached; there 's the market-place
Gaping before us.)
Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus!)
That before living he 'd learn how to live —
No end to learning:
Earn the means first — God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.
Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes!
Live now or never!"
He said, "What 's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever."
Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head:
Calculus racked him:
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
Tussis attacked him.
"Now, master, take a little rest!" — not he!
(Caution redoubled!
Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)
Not a whit troubled,
Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon
He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.
Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain!
Was it not great? did not he throw on God
(He loves the burthen) —
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?

Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment.
He ventured neck or nothing — heaven's success
Found, or earth 's failure:
"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes!
Hence with life's pale lure!"
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred 's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here — should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
While he could stammer
He settled *Hoti's* business — let it be! —
Properly based *Oun* —
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
Dead from the waist down.
Well, here 's the platform, here 's the proper place:
Hail to your purlieus,
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews!
Here 's the top-peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there;
This man decided not to Live but Know —
Bury this man there?
Here — here 's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,

Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,
Leave him — still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.

RABBI BEN EZRA

I

GROW old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

II

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed "Which rose make ours,
Which lily leave and then as best recall!"
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned "Nor Jove, nor Mars;
Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all!"

III

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men;
Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

V

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

VI

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

VII

For thence, — a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks, —
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

VIII

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man, propose this test —
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use :
I own the Past profuse
Of power each side, perfection every turn :
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole ;
Should not the heart beat once " How good to live and learn ? "

X

Not once beat " Praise be Thine !
I see the whole design,
I, who saw power, see now love perfect too :
Perfect I call Thy plan :
Thanks that I was a man !
Maker, remake, complete, — I trust what Thou shalt do ! "

XI

For pleasant is this flesh ;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled over to the earth, still yearns for rest :
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute, — gain most, as we did best !

XII

Let us not always say
" Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole ! "
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry " All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul ! "

XIII

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a God tho' in the germ

XIV

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and new:
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

XV

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold:
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame:
Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

XVI

For, note when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the gray:
A whisper from the west
Shoots — "Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

XVII

So, still within this life,
Tho' lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main,
That acquiescence vain:
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

XVIII

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX

As it was better, youth
Should strive, thro' acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age: wait death nor be afraid!

XX

Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past!
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained,
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They, this thing, and I, that: whom shall my soul believe?

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account:
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke thro' language and escaped:
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

XXVII

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX

What tho' the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
What tho' about thy rim,
Scull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

XXX

Look not thou down but up!
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow!
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with earth's wheel?

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest men!
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I, — to the wheel of life
With shapes and colours rife,
Bound dizzily, — mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

XXXII

So, take and use Thy work,
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

ABT VOGLER

(*After he has been Extemporizing upon the Musical Instrument of his Invention*)

I

WOULD that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon willed
Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,
Man, brute, reptile, fly, — alien of end and of aim,
Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed, —
Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name,
And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess he loved!

II

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!
Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now combine,
Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down to hell,
Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace well,
Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

III

And another would mount and march, like the excellent minion he was,
Ay, another and yet another, one crowd but with many a crest,
Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass,
Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest:
For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,
When a great illumination surprises a festal night —
Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to spire)
Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was in sight.

IV

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match man's birth,
Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the earth,
As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale the sky:
Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering star;
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.

V

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare and glow,
Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,
Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow,
Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;
Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed thro' the body and gone,

But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new:
What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
And what is, — shall I say, matched both? for I was made perfect too.

VI

All thro' my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,
All thro' my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,
All thro' music and me! For think, had I painted the whole,
Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-worth:
Had I written the same, made verse — still, effect proceeds from cause,
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told;
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,
Painter and poet are proud, in the artist-list enrolled: —

VII

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them, and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is naught;
It is everywhere in the world — loud, soft, and all is said:
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought,
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!

VIII

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come too slow;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he feared,
That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was to go.

Never to be again! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better, perchance: is this your comfort to me?
To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God: ay, what was, shall be.

IX

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

X

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.

XI

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should be prized?

Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome; 't is we musicians know.

XII

Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor, — yes,
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep:
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,
The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.

SAUL

I

SAID Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and did kiss his cheek.
And he, "Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.

II

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!"

III

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered and gone,
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my way on

Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid
But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!" And no voice replied.
At the first I saw naught but the blackness; but soon I descried
A something more black than the blackness — the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent roof, showed Saul,

IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time, — so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.

V

Then I tuned my harp, — took off the lilies we twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide — those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us, — so blue and so far!

VI

— Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland will each
leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then, what has
weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand house —
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird and half
mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our
fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.

VII

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine-song,
when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great
hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life. — And then, the
last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey — "Bear, bear
him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm-seeds
not here
To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.
"Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!" — And then,
the glad chaunt
Of the marriage, — first go the young maidens, next, she whom
we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling. — And then, the great
march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch
Naught can break; who shall harm them, our friends? — Then,
the chorus intoned
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned.
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with a start
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,
As I sang, —

IX

" Oh, our manhood's prime vigour! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword thou didst guard
When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious reward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as men sung
The low song of the nearly departed, and hear her faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness, ' Let one more attest,

I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime, and all was for best!'
Then they sung thro' their tears in strong triumph, not much, but the rest.
And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working whence grew
Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit strained true:
And the friends of thy boyhood — that boyhood of wonder and hope,
Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's scope, —
Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is thine:
And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head combine!
On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and rage (like the throe
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour and lets the gold go)
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning them, — all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature — King Saul!"

X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit, — heart, hand, harp and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for — as when, dare I say,
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains thro' its array,
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot — "Saul!" cried I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul, who hung propped
By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was struck by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to the aim,

And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate, — leaves grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet, your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages untold:
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest — all hail, there they are!
—Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the green on his crest
For their food in the ardours of summer. One long shudder thrilled
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and was stilled
At the King's self left standing before me, released and aware.
What was gone, what remained? All to traverse 'twixt hope and despair.
Death was past, life not come: so he waited. Awhile his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant, forthwith to remand
To their place what new objects should enter: 't was Saul as before.
I looked up, and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean — a sun's slow decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely; so, arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

XI

What spell or what charm,
(For awhile there was trouble within me) what next should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him? Song filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye,
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they put by?
He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets me praise life,
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the sheep
Fed in silence — above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie
'Neath his ken, tho' I saw but the strip 'twixt the hill and the sky:
And I laughed — "Since my days are ordained to be passed with my flocks,
Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains and the rocks,
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image the show
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly shall know!
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the courage that gains
And the prudence that keeps what men strive for!" And now these old trains

Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so, once more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus —

XIII

"Yea, my King,"
I began — "thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts that spring
From the mere mortal life held in common by man and by brute:
In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.
Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree, — how its stem trembled first
Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then safely outburst
The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when these too, in turn
Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet more was to learn,
E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our dates shall we slight,
When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care for the plight
Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so! stem and branch
Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine shall staunch
Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!
By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy
More indeed, than at first when, inconscious, the life of a boy.
Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun
Looking down on the earth, tho' clouds spoil him, tho' tempests efface,
Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace

The results of his past summer-prime, — so, each ray of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardour, till they too give forth
A like cheer to their sons: who in turn, fill the South and the North
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse in the past!

But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last.
As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her height,
So with man — so his power and his beauty for ever take flight.
No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look forth o'er the years!
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the seer's!
Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his tomb — bid arise
A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to the skies,
Let it mark where the great First King slumbers: whose fame would ye know?
Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall go
In great characters cut by the scribe, — Such was Saul, so he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid, —
For not half, they 'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they shall spend
(See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise, and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story, — the statesman's great word
Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river 's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet-winds rave:

So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou art!"

XIV

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst grant me that day,
And before it not seldom hast granted thy help to essay,
Carry on and complete an adventure, — my shield and my sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my word, —
Still be with me, who then at the summit of human endeavour
And scaling the highest, man's thought could, gazed hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me — till, mighty to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance — God's throne from man's grave!
Let me tell out my tale to its ending — my voice to my heart
Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last night I took part
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with my sheep,
And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep!
For I wake in the gray dewy covert, while Hebron upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV

I say then, — my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and, ever more strong,
Made a proffer of good to console him — he slowly resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted the swathes
Of his turban, and see — the huge sweat that his countenance bathes,

He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory, — ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, tho' much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop, till, stayed by the pile
Of his armour and war-cloak and garments, he leaned there awhile,
And sat out my singing, — one arm round the tent-prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack — till I touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all time to the man patient there:
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was, 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave but in mild settled will, on my brow: thro' my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with kind power —
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.
Thus held he me there with his great eyes that scrutinized mine —
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where was the sign?
I yearned — "Could I help thee, my father, inventing a bliss,
I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;

I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,
As this moment, — had love but the warrant, love's heart to dispense! "

XVI

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more — no song more! outbroke —

XVII

" I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke;
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain
And pronounced on the rest of his handwork — returned him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw,
I report as a man may of God's work — all 's love, yet all 's law.
Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each faculty tasked
To perceive him has gained an abyss, where a dewdrop was asked.
Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom laid bare.
Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the Infinite Care!
Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes, — and perfection, no more and no less,
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.
And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet.
Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity known,
I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of my own.
There 's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hoodwink,
I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I think)
Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I worst
E'en the Giver in one gift. — Behold, I could love if I durst!
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may o'ertake
God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain for love's sake.

— What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when doors great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the hundredth appal?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the greatest of all?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the creator, — the end, what began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest),
These good things being given, to go on, and give one more, the best?
Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height
This perfection, — succeed with life's dayspring, death's minute of night?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now, — and bid him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life, — a new harmony yet
To be run and continued, and ended — who knows? — or endure!
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to make sure;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

XVIII

"I believe it! 'T is thou, God, that givest, 't is I who receive:
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.
All 's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my prayer,
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread Sabaoth:
I will? — the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth
To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare
Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?
This; — 't is not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!
See the King — I would help him, but cannot, the wishes fall through.
Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would — knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak thro' me now!
Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou — so wilt thou!
So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown —
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!
As thy love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.
'T is the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

XIX

I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware:
I repressed, I got thro' them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news —
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth —
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the gray of the hills;
In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind-thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling still,
Tho' averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and chill
That rose heavily as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent — he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-bowers:
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices — "E'en so, it is so!"

THE GUARDIAN-ANGEL

A Picture at Fano

I

DEAR and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave
That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!
Let me sit all the day here, that when eve
Shall find performed thy special ministry,
And time come for departure, thou, suspending
Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,
Another still to quiet and retrieve.

II

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,
From where thou standest now, to where I gaze.
— And suddenly my head is covered o'er
With those wings, white above the child who prays
Now on that tomb — and I shall feel thee guarding
Me, out of all the world; for me, discarding
Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes its door

III

I would not look up thither past thy head
Because the door opes, like that child, I know,
For I should have thy gracious face instead,
Thou bird of God! And wilt thou bend me low
Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

IV

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My head beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

V

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

VI

Guercino drew this angel I saw teach
(Alfred, dear friend!) — that little child to pray,
Holding the little hands up, each to each
Pressed gently, — with his own head turned away
Over the earth where so much lay before him
Of work to do, tho' heaven was opening o'er him,
And he was left at Fano by the beach.

VII

We were at Fano, and three times we went
To sit and see him in his chapel there,
And drink his beauty to our soul's content
— My angel with me too: and since I care
For dear Guercino's fame (to which in power
And glory comes this picture for a dower,
Fraught with a pathos so magnificent) —

VIII

And since he did not work thus earnestly
  At all times, and has else endured some wrong —
I took one thought his picture struck from me,
  And spread it out, translating it to song.
My love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?
How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end?
  This is Ancona, yonder is the sea.

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

THAT second time they hunted me
From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds through the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,—
I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,
Bright creeping through the moss they love:
— How long it seems since Charles was lost!
Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
The country in my very sight;
And when that peril ceased at night,
The sky broke out in red dismay
With signal fires; well, there I lay
Close covered o'er in my recess,
Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
Thinking on Metternich our friend,
And Charles's miserable end,
And much beside, two days; the third,
Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
The peasants from the village go
To work among the maize; you know,
With us in Lombardy, they bring
Provisions packed on mules, a string
With little bells that cheer their task,
And casks, and boughs on every cask
To keep the sun's heat from the wine;
These I let pass in jingling line,
And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
The peasants from the village, too;

For at the very rear would troop
Their wives and sisters in a group
To help, I knew. When these had passed,
I threw my glove to strike the last,
Taking the chance: she did not start,
Much less cry out, but stooped apart,
One instant rapidly glanced round,
And saw me beckon from the ground;
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt;
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that; my glove lay in her breast.
Then I drew breath: they disappeared:
It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts; on me
Rested the hopes of Italy;
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 't was told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth;
I meant to call a freak of youth
This hiding, and give hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood,
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm —
At first sight of her eyes, I said,
"I am that man upon whose head
They fix the price, because I hate
The Austrians over us: the State
Will give you gold — oh, gold so much! —
If you betray me to their clutch,

And be your death, for aught I know,
If once they find you saved their foe.
Now, you must bring me food and drink,
And also paper, pen and ink,
And carry safe what I shall write
To Padua, which you'll reach at night
Before the duomo shuts; go in,
And wait till Tenebræ begin;
Walk to the third confessional,
Between the pillar and the wall,
And kneeling whisper, *Whence comes peace?*
Say it a second time, then cease;
And if the voice inside returns,
From Christ and Freedom; what concerns
The cause of Peace? — for answer, slip
My letter where you placed your lip;
Then come back happy we have done
Our mother service — I, the son,
As you the daughter of our land!"

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:
I was no surer of sunrise
Than of her coming. We conferred
Of her own prospects, and I heard
She had a lover — stout and tall,
She said — then let her eyelids fall,
"He could do much" — as if some doubt
Entered her heart, — then, passing out,
"She could not speak for others, who
Had other thoughts; herself she knew:"
And so she brought me drink and food.
After four days, the scouts pursued
Another path; at last arrived
The help my Paduan friends contrived
To furnish me: she brought the news.
For the first time I could not choose

But kiss her hand, and lay my own
Upon her head — "This faith was shown
To Italy, our mother; she
Uses my hand and blesses thee."
She followed down to the sea-shore;
I left and never saw her more.

How very long since I have thought
Concerning — much less wished for — aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die!
I never was in love; and since
Charles proved false, what shall now convince
My inmost heart I have a friend?
However, if I pleased to spend
Real wishes on myself — say, three —
I know at least what one should be.
I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distil
In blood through these two hands. And next
— Nor much for that am I perplexed —
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart
Under his new employers. Last
— Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
Do I grow old and out of strength.
If I resolved to seek at length
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
— Disowned me long ago, men say;
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so — perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine —
Are turning wise: while some opine
"Freedom grows license," some suspect
"Haste breeds delay," and recollect

They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen "All 's for best,"
The land seems settling to its rest.
I think then, I should wish to stand
This evening in that dear, lost land,
Over the sea the thousand miles,
And know if yet that woman smiles
With the calm smile; some little farm
She lives in there, no doubt: what harm
If I sat on the door-side bench,
And, while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,
Inquired of all her fortunes — just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them. I'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,
Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing — how
It steals the time! To business now.

INSTANS TYRANNUS

I

OF the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind.

II

I struck him, he grovelled of course —
For, what was his force?
I pinned him to earth with my weight
And persistence of hate:
And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
As his lot might be worse.

III

"Were the object less mean, would he stand
At the swing of my hand!
For obscurity helps him and blots
The hole where he squats."
So, I set my five wits on the stretch
To inveigle the wretch.
All in vain! Gold and jewels I threw.
Still he couched there perdue;
I tempted his blood and his flesh,
Hid in roses my mesh,
Choicest cates and the flagon's best spilth:
Still he kept to his filth.

IV

Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, did I press:
Just a son or a mother to seize!
No such booty as these.
Were it simply a friend to pursue
'Mid my million or two,
Who could pay me in person or pelf
What he owes me himself!
No: I could not but smile through my chafe:
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
— Through minuteness, to wit.

V

Then a humour more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth
'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain.
And, "no!" I admonished myself,
"Is one mocked by an elf,
Is one baffled by toad or by rat?
The gravamen 's in that!
How the lion, who crouches to suit
His back to my foot,
Would admire that I stand in debate!
But the small turns the great
If it vexes you, — that is the thing!
Toad or rat vex the king?
Though I waste half my realm to unearth
Toad or rat, 'tis well worth!"

VI

So, I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break,
Ran my fires for his sake;
Over-head, did my thunder combine
With my underground mine:
Till I looked from my labor content
To enjoy the event.

VII

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
Did I say "without friend"?
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun's self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest!
Do you see? Just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
— So, *I* was afraid!

PROSPICE

FEAR death? — to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Tho' a battle 's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so — one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forebore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute 's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

EPILOGUE TO "ASOLANDO"

AT the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where — by death, fools think, imprisoned —
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
— Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
— Being — who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, tho' right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed, — fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

NOTES

NOTES

I

The first division of this book consists of poems of action, and begins appropriately with the war songs or "Cavalier Tunes." In the series of stories which follow, the special quality of the narration in each should be noted. One of Browning's great gifts was that of choosing and developing some special point of view, and by this means giving to his narrative its special colour and quality. In each of the following the treatment suggests the local colour. Some are legends, some founded on fact, but each has its special feeling of time, place, nationality, etc. "The Pied Piper" is thoroughly German in its flavour; "Hervé Riel," on the other hand, quite French; "Count Gismond," mediæval and Provençal; while "Pheidippides" is full of a classic feeling, instinct with Greek fire and enthusiasm.

CAVALIER TUNES. Page 1

For the background of these "tunes" we must turn to the great struggle between Charles I. and the Puritans, which broke into Civil War in 1642, and resulted in the trial and execution of the king in 1649. The cavaliers, or supporters of the king, had many poets among them, and left a large body of verse known as cavalier lyrics, among the most famous of which is Colonel Lovelace's "To Lucasta: On Going to the Wars." (See *The Golden Treasury*, page 88.) These songs of Browning's are quite unlike the polished verses of the cavalier poets. They are written in imitation of the rough songs of soldiers, and are alive with the spirit of action. Their differences in rhythm should be noted. The first gives the swing of marching men; the second is a tavern song; the third suggests the motion of horseback-riding.

I. MARCHING ALONG. Page 1

LINE 2. **Crop-headed.** An allusion to the fact that the Puritans wore their hair short in protest against the worldly vanity typified by the long, curling locks of the cavaliers.

7. Pym. John Pym (1584–1643) was the leader of Parliament in its attempt to curb the king's power. — **Carles.** An old English word close in meaning to "churls."

8. Parles. Speeches.

13. Hampden. John Hampden (1594–1643) was next to Pym the most important figure among the parliamentary leaders. He was killed early in the Civil War in a skirmish at Chalgrove Field.

14. Hazelrig. Sir Arthur Hazelrig, another of Pym's lieutenants. He died in the tower in 1661. — **Fiennes.** Nathaniel Fiennes (1609–1669) was a leading member of Parliament, and an intimate friend of Cromwell. — **Young Harry.** Young Sir Henry Vane (1612–1662) was the son of one of Charles' secretaries of state, known as the elder Sir Henry Vane. The younger Vane was a strict Puritan, and was for a short time governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1636–1637). He was beheaded after the accession of Charles II.

15. Rupert. Prince of Bavaria, son of James I.'s daughter Elizabeth (1619–1682). He went to England to take up Charles I.'s cause, and became notorious for his reckless courage.

II. GIVE A ROUSE. Page 2

Rouse. Perhaps Browning had in mind Shakespeare's use of the term for the shout that accompanies drinking.

16. Noll. A contemptuous reference to Oliver Cromwell.

III. BOOT AND SADDLE. Page 3

The song is supposed to be sung by a royalist nobleman, riding to rescue Castle Brancepeth (a stronghold near Durham), besieged by the Roundheads, and defended by his wife, Gertrude.

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR. Page 4

Another of Browning's metrical experiments — notice the rocking monotony of the recurring rhyme, *ride*, *guide*, *side*, etc. This effect of saddle-gait is increased by the use of short words of one syllable. The speaker is an Arab, riding to join his chief Abd-el-Kadr, who in 1831 collected the tribes in Algeria to resist the French invasion. He surrendered to the French in 1847, and was liberated by Louis Napoleon in 1852.

Metidja. A plain in Algeria, southwest of Algiers.

5. Double-eyed. As we say, "gifted with second sight."

38. The Prophet and the Bride. Mohammed and his favourite wife, Ayesha.

HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX. Page 6

A rousing good story, of which the key-note is the galloping of hard-pushed horses. There is a strain, a tense eagerness which rushes the verses along to the fine climax of bestowing upon the noble Roland the last measure of wine in the saved city. Compare the swift motion of this with the much heavier and more monotonous rhythm of the preceding poem.

The date, 16—, suggests that Browning had in mind as the subject of his poem a possible occurrence in the struggle between the Netherlands and Spain, or in the Thirty Years' War. Ghent is an important city in what is now Belgium; Aix, or Aix-la-Chapelle, is just across the boundary, in Germany. The actual route of the ride is interesting to follow; it covers a distance of more than ninety miles. Hasselt, where the first horse goes down, is almost eighty miles from Ghent. The next towns mentioned are out of the direct road to Aix. Apparently Browning made up his route without consulting the atlas. We have his own words that the incident is imaginary, and that the poem was written on shipboard "after I had been at sea long enough to appreciate even the fancy of a gallop."

10. Pique. The point of the saddle.

49. Buff-coat. A leather coat, so thick as to serve for armour.

50. Jack-boots. Boots which came above the knee, also worn as armour in the seventeenth century.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP. Page 9

This poem celebrates Napoleon's siege, in 1809, of Ratisbon, a Bavarian city on the Danube, called in German Regensburg. Browning would have us feel the glow of enthusiasm which played around the great general, and flamed into individual acts of heroism.

11. Lannes. Jean Lannes, Duc de Montebello (1769–1809), one of Napoleon's most brilliant and trusted marshals. He was killed later in the campaign.

28. Flag-bird. Eagle.

29. Fans. Wings.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN. Page 11

This vivacious tale was written for a small boy, the son of William Macready the actor. It is elaborated from a North German legend

dating from the fourteenth century. Browning's version is chiefly remarkable for its rollicking wealth of rhymes, often double and sometimes triple (as "mutinous" and "glutinous"), used for humourous effect as in *The Ingoldsby Legends*.

15. Sprats. The sprat is a small fish, sometimes confused with the herring.

23. Noddy. A fool.

37. Guilder. A coin worth about forty cents.

89. Cham. Usually written Khan: the ruler of the Tartar Empire in Central Asia.

91. Nizam. The title of the sovereign of Hyderabad in India.

123. Julius Cæsar. See Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*, Act I. scene 2.

138. Drysaltery. A place for curing meat or fish by drying and salting.

139. Nuncheon. Luncheon.

141. Puncheon. Barrel.

177. Prime. The first portion.

260. Needle's eye. See Matthew xix. 24.

296. Trepanned. Usually spelled trapanned. **Ensnared.**

COUNT GISMOND. Page 21

In "Count Gismond," a lady of the court of Aix, in Provence, tells the story of one birthday in her girlhood when she was chosen queen of the tournament, — of the foul accusation flung at her by the base Count Gauthier, — and of her defence and vindication by Count Gismond, whose bride she forthwith became.

86. Greaves. Armour for the thighs.

87. Hauberk. Coat of mail.

124. Tercel. A male falcon.

HERVÉ RIEL. Page 27

An episode of the war between the English and Dutch and the French, which followed the accession of William III., of Orange, to the English throne. The battle of La Hogue (1692), resulting in disaster to the French, left their fleet in imminent peril of capture by the English. The achievement which Browning's stirring ballad chronicles, the guiding of the fleet by a simple Breton sailor through a channel which the native pilots had declared impassable, is told by the Croisic guide-books, which differ only in making the sailor's demand a final leave or dismissal. Browning, with the dramatist's

instinct, secures his climax by a contrast between the greatness of the deed and the slightness of the reward, — a day's holiday. There is an admirable strength in this poem, a most skilful weaving of bluff, straightforward narrative into verse.

It is interesting to note that Browning published "Hervé Riel" in "The Cornhill Magazine" in 1871, and gave the proceeds, 100*l*, to the fund for sufferers from the siege of Paris.

1. La Hogue. A cape on the coast of Normandy, near which the battle occurred.

5. St. Malo. A seaport of importance at the mouth of the Rance.

8. Damfreville. The commander of the fleeing squadron.

43. Tourville. The French admiral (1642–1701). Though defeated by the Anglo-Dutch fleet in this battle, he won from them at St. Vincent a year later.

44. Croisickese. A native of Croisic, a small town in Brittany which was a favourite haunt of Browning's in his later life.

46. Malouins. Inhabitants of St. Malo.

49. Grève. The sands between St. Malo and Mont St. Michel are called La Grève. — **Disembogues.** Empties.

61. Solidor. A fort at the mouth of the Rance.

PHEIDIPPIDES. Page 33

This is one of Browning's best narrative poems, giving as it does, besides the story itself, a splendid background of Athenian life, character, and history. The moment is that in which Athens stood out, almost alone, against the Persian army sent by Darius to conquer Hellas, and under the captaincy of Miltiades won the victory of Marathon, 490 B. C. The story of Pheidippides is a part of Greek legend, and recorded by Herodotus. Browning adds to its dramatic force by the device, which he so often employed, of making the hero tell his own story. He is the messenger sent by Athens, threatened with destruction, to Sparta to plead for instant aid. This is refused. The runner, returning in despair, encounters the god Pan, who, majestical, magnanimous, promises aid in the approaching combat, and renews in the pious messenger strength and confidence. For himself, as he tells us, Pan's promise is "release from the racer's toil," which comes, not as he has interpreted it, as rest and a peaceful old age, but as glorious death in the supreme moment of triumph, — "joy in his blood bursting his heart."

χαίρετε, νικῶμεν. Rejoice, we conquer.

2. Dæmons. Tutelary divinities, supposed by the Greeks to guard and guide individuals and families.

4. Her of the ægis and spear. Minerva. — **Aegis.** shield.

5. Ye of bow and buskin. Diana, or Artemis, the huntress. — **Buskin.** A shoe laced about the ankle.

8. Pan. A Greek word, meaning *all.* Pan was god of all nature, and of things natural and out-of-doors, woods, fields, etc. Browning calls him the goat-god, because he was thought by the Greeks to be half human and half goat. The belief was that he turned the tide of battle at Marathon by appearing among the Persians and filling them with terror. Hence pan-ic.

9. Tettix. The grasshopper, which was supposed to have sprung from the ground. The golden grasshopper was worn by the Athenians to signify their right to their territory as descendants of earth-born possessors. — **Archons.** A Greek word for rulers: nine archons constituted the governing body of Athens.

18. Water and earth. The form of demand used by Persia in exacting submission.

19. Eretria. A city on the island of Eubœa, north of Athens.

32. Phoibos. Phœbus Apollo.

38. The moon half orbed. The Spartans were famous for their delays, and consultation of omens, such as states of the weather and of the moon.

47. Filleted victim. Animals for sacrifice were decked with bands or fillets of ribbon.

52. Parnes. Mountains west of Athens. Herodotus says that the meeting occurred on Mount Parthenium.

62. Erebos. Hades.

83. Fennel. In Greek, Marathon, — a prophecy of the place where the great battle should be fought.

89. Miltiades. The "Tyrant of the Chersonese" on the Hellespont. He fled before the Persian invasion and took refuge at Athens where he was chosen to command the Greek Army which won the battle of Marathon.

106. Akropolis. The citadel of a Greek town.

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL. Page 38

In "The Boy and the Angel" Browning has set himself to put a purely moral theme into the form of legend. Theocrite, the poor artisan, longs to be Pope that he may praise God that great way, and lo! he vanishes from his cell and has his wish. But God misses

the humble voice of praise, and the angel Gabriel, sinking to earth, strives to fill Theocrite's place. Still, to God's ear, the voice is not the same. "I miss my little human praise." Then Gabriel seeks Theocrite in the Pope's abode and bids him go back to his humble occupation, and renew that voice of praise which, in his absence, God has lacked. The angel takes his place as Pope, but at Theocrite's death, they come before God side by side, the humblest equal with the highest, since, in his own place, each has fulfilled his mission. The same lesson is the burden of the song in *Pippa Passes*.

"All service ranks the same with God."

51. Dight. Prepared; adorned.

CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME. Page 41

"Childe Roland" is of all Browning's poems the one which has provoked most discussion and controversy. Some critics are for making it an elaborate allegory. Some think it merely a long and rather dull tale. Miss Porter and Miss Clarke tell us that "Childe Roland" symbolizes the conquest of despair by "fealty to the Ideal." Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in a characteristic outburst, calls it an entirely new and curious type of poetry, the poetry of the shabby and hungry aspect of the earth. "Daring poets who wished to escape from conventional gardens and orchards had long been in the habit of celebrating the poetry of rugged and gloomy landscapes, but Browning is not content with this. He insists upon celebrating the poetry of mean landscapes. That sense of scrubbiness in nature, as of a man unshaved, has never been conveyed with this enthusiasm and primeval gusto before.

> "'If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
> Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
> Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
> In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
> All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
> Pashing their life out with a brute's intents.'

"This is a perfect realization of that eerie sentiment which comes upon us, not so often among mountains and waterfalls, as it does on some half-starved common at twilight, or in walking down some mean grey street. It is the song of the beauty of refuse; and Browning was the first to sing it. Oddly enough, it has been one of

the poems about which most of those pedantic and trivial questions have been asked, which are asked invariably by those who treat Browning as a science instead of a poet, 'What does the poem of Childe Roland mean?' The only genuine answer to this is what does anything mean? Does the earth mean nothing? Do grey skies and wastes covered with thistles mean nothing? Does an old horse turned out to graze mean nothing? If it does, there is but one further truth to be added, that everything means nothing."

This is certainly a vivid and appreciative analysis of the narrative and doubtless strikes the key of it. Browning was evidently caught by the high note of romance and mystery in the line from *Lear*, and, with a quick imaginative leap into the paradoxical, built upon it a narrative compounded of the sordid, the grotesque, and the fantastic. The story itself is very slight. We are to imagine a wayfarer in search of a distant tower, who has asked the way of an old cripple and been directed into a most "ominous tract." Yet he fares forward grimly, in spite of the physical horror of the landscape and the moral horror of the presentiment that his quest must after all end in failure. What the "dark tower" is, or wherefore it must be sought, or whether its finding is anything more than the end of a tragedy, we are not told. Only this we know, that Childe Roland finished his quest, and bore himself bravely at the last. Surely, there is moral enough in this to satisfy us.

48. Estray. One who has strayed.

58. Cockle. A weed, like the tare, that grows among corn. — **Spurge.** A plant with an acrid, milky juice.

64. Skills. Matters.

66. Calcine. Reduce to powder by heat.

68. Bents. Coarse grasses.

70. Dock. A name given to many weeds, e. g. the burdock.

72. Pashing. Dashing.

80. Colloped. Probably, marked with blows. (Cf. Fr. *coup*).

114. Bespate. Spat upon, or perhaps spattered. Notice how the words are chosen to strengthen the impression of sordid horror.

130. Pad. Tread down.

135. Mews. An inclosure.

143. Tophet. A place in the valley of Gehenna, where the idolatrous Jews worshipped with sacrifices of children. The name became synonymous with hell.

150. Rubble. Broken stone.

160. Apollyon. The angel of the bottomless pit. See Rev. ix. 2.

161. Dragon-penned. Furnished with feathers like those in a dragon's wing.

179. Nonce. A word usually found in the phrase "for the nonce," meaning "for the once," "for one time." Here, "at the very moment."

203. Slug-horn. Properly not a horn at all, but a battle shout, from "slogan."

II

The next group includes poems which are mainly descriptive in quality or purpose, or are inspired by a feeling for place. In them, as in the background of the narratives, is to be noted Browning's exact local colour, his specific use of detail, whether he is looking out upon Italian landscape and life, or remembering his English home, or calling up, by imagination, suggestive touches of remote time and place, as in the song from *Paracelsus*.

HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD. HOME THOUGHTS FROM THE SEA. Pages 50, 51

These poems suggest two contrasting moods of the love of country.

1. Cape St. Vincent. The southwestern point of Portugal. Near this cape the English fleet of fifteen vessels, under Jervis, won a glorious victory over nearly twice as many Spanish ships, February 14, 1797.

2. Cadiz. A town on the southern coast of Spain; the scene of another splendid exploit in 1596, when the English fleet, under Essex and Raleigh, entered the harbour and destroyed the second Spanish armada.

3. Trafalgar. A cape east of Cadiz, off which Nelson won his greatest victory, over the combined French and Spanish fleets, October 21, 1805.

SONG FROM PARACELSUS. Page 52

This song is set into Part IV. of *Paracelsus*. The hero, beaten and baffled, is speaking of his early aims and dreams.

> "Not but they had their beauty; who should know
> Their passing beauty if not I? Still, dreams
> They were, so let them vanish, yet in beauty
> If that may be. Stay: thus they pass in song!
> (He sings.)"

This invocation of beauty is a fit prelude to the lingering, odorous sweetness of the song. There is in it a strange suggestion of the Orient, with its heavy, mysterious perfumes, — and of the past, with its melancholy, soft and subtly scented, of decay.

1. Cassia. A large genus of tropical shrubs, one being the cinnamon. — **Sandal-buds.** Buds of the sandal tree, well known for its sweetly scented wood.

2. Labdanum. A gum obtained from a Spanish shrub, and formerly used as a perfume. The word, as laudanum, is applied to the juice of opium. — **Aloe-balls.** The juice of the aloe is resinous, and may be evaporated into solid masses.

3. Nard. An aromatic ointment; the spikenard of the New Testament. See Luke vii. 37. Compare Browning's method here with that in "Childe Roland," Stanzas X.–XII.

DE GUSTIBUS. Page 53

The title is from the Latin, *De gustibus non disputandum*, "No accounting for tastes." Here we have Browning's two loves, England and Italy, set in exquisite contrast. At the close there is a suggestion of the long struggle of Italy for freedom and unity.

36. Liver-wing. The right wing of a bird, under which the liver was placed in cooking. Here, right arm.

37. Bourbon arm. The Bourbon kings were expelled from Naples in 1860.

40. Queen Mary's saying. Mary Tudor so grieved for the loss of Calais to the French that she declared that the word would be found written on her heart.

43. Open my heart. The next two lines are inscribed on the Palazzo Rezzonico, Venice, in which Browning died.

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY. Page 55

The poet is endeavouring to amuse a little Italian maid, while the scirocco blows, by reminding her of all the picturesque details of life about Sorrento, — the queer prizes the fishermen catch, the youngsters in the wine vats, the luncheon of cheese-balls and prickly pears. Then he remembers the aspect of mountain and shore, with a marvellous piling up of unusual and significant detail, and at the end comes a laughing comment on a storm in England at the moment, — the political tempest over the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1845.

Piano di Sorrento. The plain of Sorrento on the coast, south of Naples.

3. Scirocco. The south wind which frequently blows over Italy in a perfect whirlwind, sometimes bringing rain.

9. Those creatures you make such account of. The little field birds which the Italians consider a great delicacy; they are broiled whole and eaten with the fingers.

24. Frails. Baskets.

49. Lasagne. An Italian word for one of the numerous varieties of macaroni.

61. Medlars. A fruit which is eaten only in a state of decay.

69. Sorbs. The fruit of the European mountain ash.

100. Galli. These islands are supposed to be those described in the Odyssey (Book XII.), as the home of the Sirens who tempted Ulysses and his sailors.

133. Bellini, Auber. Vincenzo Bellini (1802–1835), Italian; Daniel F. E. Auber (1782–1871), French. Two famous composers of the time.

145. Corn Laws. The laws placing import duties on bread stuffs which were repealed by Parliament under the lead of Sir Robert Peel, in 1846. The elliptical last line suggests Browning's liberalism. "You might as well ask if 't were proper," etc.

UP AT A VILLA — DOWN IN THE CITY. Page 61

In delightful contrast to the foregoing enthusiastic appreciation of the country and country life, we have now the probable point of view of the Italian of birth, obliged, through lack of means, to live in the country. This hits to the life the average Italian's love of the city, and of proximity to his fellows. We get a delightfully whimsical distortion of rural beauties through the eyes of the man who does not love them.

29. Conch. Shell.

42. Pulcinello-trumpet. The signal of travelling players, among whom the Pulcinello or buffoon is always a character.

51. The procession. A reference to the custom of carrying the image of the Virgin through the streets on Holy Thursday.

56. What oil pays. A reference to the city tax on all country produce entering the gates.

III

The third section gives selections from Browning's love poetry: songs from his plays, dramatically lyrical discussions of the love problems of others, and personal expressions of the great love which so nobly filled his own life. Browning, like Dante before him, believed in love as the highest mood of human experience, the mood in which, if ever, there comes to man insight into the purpose of the world, and inspiration to noble action in it. Hence he puts a genuine personal conviction into the love songs which breathe the spirit of chivalry and loyal devotion, such as the "Page's Song" in *Pippa Passes*, and "Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli." But Browning is also a critic of love. He recognises the incompleteness of human passion, its errors and disappointments, the thwarting effect of circumstance. Yet, in spite of all, he is an optimist. True love, though unspoken, unreturned, seems to him too divine a thing to lose itself utterly in failure. Even misdirected love may stir the soul to nobler living. And a true love that is denied fulfilment in this life only gives ground for believing in the life beyond. Thus Browning has a philosophy of love, which should be remembered in connection with his general view of life set forth in the poems of Group IV.

The chief quality that makes Browning's lyrics striking is their unusual and irregular measure. Songs they truly are, with much of musical notation in them, — runs, rests, and notes of varying time value.

SONGS FROM PIPPA PASSES. Page 66

These are taken from a long dramatic poem, descriptive of the course of one day in the life of an Italian girl, Felippa or Pippa. The first is the pure joy of living. The second tells a little story. It is the lament of a young page that his lady is so fatally far above him as to need no service from him; and as a refrain to each stanza we hear the lady longing to listen to him, and her maiden assuring her that 'tis only a page, singing to himself.

6. Kate the Queen. Katherine Cornaro, born in Venice about 1454; daughter of Marco Cornaro. She was married to the king of Cyprus, and on his death succeeded to the throne, which, in 1489, she abdicated in favour of the Venetian Republic. She was given a small estate at Asolo, where her palace is still to be seen.

18. Jesses. Straps of leather or silk bound upon the legs of hawks.

LOVE IN A LIFE; LIFE IN A LOVE. Pages 68, 69

These two poems, with contrasted titles, are not so much contrasting as supplementary in thought. The first sighs over the elusiveness of love; the second sweeps everything aside with the resolve to achieve love by devoting all life to the quest.

MEETING AT NIGHT; PARTING AT MORNING. Pages 71, 72

These are evidently meant to be companion poems. The second has occasioned a good deal of solemn exegesis. Does the man speak, and is the path of gold the sun's? Or does a woman speak, and is the path of gold her lover's progress to fortune? We counsel the reader to interpret as his own imagination urges.

SUMMUM BONUM. Page 73

The title means the highest good, the ultimate ideal. That this pretty bit of boyishness was produced when the poet was over seventy years old is worth noting.

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE. Page 74

Mr. Arthur Symons says of this poem: "An exquisitely spontaneous lyric, which, in its strength of spiritual passion and intensity of serene and joyous hope, it would be hard indeed to excel."

SONGS FROM "JAMES LEE'S WIFE." Pages 75, 76, 77

These three songs are taken from a series of nine, bearing different indications of place, all the utterances of a woman struggling with the realization that she has lost her husband's love. These three, taken separately, contain but a suggestion of the main theme, — which is, by Browning's favourite method, developed indirectly, — and are given here more for their quality of song than for the story they tell. The first is a wonderful bit of out-of-doors in the autumn, ending with a note of courage, and confidence in the power of the human spirit to defy change. The second bears testimony to the power of love to make beautiful what else were common and barren in life; and the third repeats that faith in the goodness of love in and for itself, even when the object of it is unworthy.

III. 19. Bent. Coarse grass.

V. 16. Barded and chanfroned. Bard and chanfron are names for

the defensive armour of a horse, the latter referring especially to the head-covering.

17. Quixote-mage. From Don Quixote, the knight errant, and the magi, or wise men, who came to worship Jesus. The word thus contains the two elements of chivalry and of worship.

MISCONCEPTIONS. Page 78

Another poem of disappointment in love, not without a note of happiness in what had been.

11. Dalmatic. A rich ecclesiastical vestment.

THE LOST MISTRESS. Page 79

This poem expresses the mood which was perhaps the essence of Browning's nature, to make of dignity and value every possible human experience. He dismisses all complaining from the rejected lover's lips, and makes him take up his burden with a certain robust simplicity, not without a touch of humour.

IN THREE DAYS. Page 81

The beautifully conveyed breathlessness of the first stanza, and the climax of the image in the second make one wish that Browning had ended his poem there. The rest is certainly not worthy of the beginning.

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI. Page 83

There is a beautifully wrought bit of poetic imagery in the lover's plaintive, rather sadly humourous comparison of himself and his devotion to the sunflower, which, in its absorption in its idol, has lost all "a flower's true grace" and become a "foolish mimic sun."

The story of the love of Geoffrey de Rudel, a Provençal troubadour of the twelfth century, for the Countess of Tripoli, whom he had never seen but of whose beauty he had heard, is one of the famous examples of chivalric love in the Middle Ages. Rudel, at length, set out for the East by sea, but was taken ill on the way. He lived to reach Tripoli, where the Countess went on board his vessel, and he died in her arms. The story has been told in Edmond Rostand's play, *La Princesse Lointaine*.

28. 'T is a woman's skill. The weaving needs a woman's skill.

EVELYN HOPE. Page 85

A bit of Browning's philosophy, with love as a theme. Nothing of love's pain or passion is here, but the calm, tranquil conviction of the middle-aged man that his love for a girl of sixteen, though never told and never divined, will somehow, in the life to come, be justified and understood.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER. Page 88

Again we meet Browning's philosophy of unflinching and unrepining acceptance of whatever blows life deals. The rejected lover begs a last favour of his lady, one more ride together, and into the enjoyment of that ride throws all the forces of his being. It is curious how, beyond the motion conveyed by the rhythm of the verse, there is scarcely a suggestion of out-of-doors in the whole poem. It is an inner and spiritual landscape that is unrolled to us. The man, reflecting as he rides on "the petty done, the undone vast," passes in review the world's achievers, statesman, soldier, poet, sculptor, musician, and dismisses them all, — "For me, I ride."

81. Burn. Brook.

86. Intend. Pretend.

90. Sublimate. Etherealize.

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA. Page 92

One of the most pessimistic of Browning's love poems. The sinister oppression of the night is a prelude to the harsh rejection of the lover, symbolized by the obdurate windows and the grinding gate.

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA. Page 95

Here Browning uses out-of-doors with great simplicity and beauty to give poignancy to an inner, spiritual experience. Why, he cries, cannot human souls enter into the life of this great unchanging Campagna, where there is "such letting nature have her way"? One instant it seems that the two souls are to be fused in one; the next, they are standing infinitely apart.

The Campagna, meaning plain, is the name given to the low, open country lying about the present city of Rome. It is practically the area once covered by the ancient Latium, whence the phrase "Rome's ghost" (line 25), and is dotted with crumbling ruins.

15. Weft. The cross thread in weaving, so called because *wafted* from side to side through the warp.

BY THE FIRESIDE. Page 98

Contrast with the incomplete human relation of "Two in the Campagna" the union made perfect of two souls in that moment of perfect understanding which the poet celebrates in this lyric of old age. Though the episode of the walk which leads to that "moment one and infinite" may be wholly imaginary, yet the reader feels at once that the poem is inspired by Browning's own experience. "That great brow and the spirit-small hand propping it" clearly refers to Mrs. Browning. In this poem, as in those which precede it, Browning gives us a landscape painted with lavish detail and colour, a landscape which has its influence upon the human beings who walk therein, but which has its own life quite apart from their moods. The habit of seeing nature through the eyes of human emotion has been called by Ruskin "the pathetic fallacy." Browning's robust sense of reality is shown by his power to take an objective view of nature.

84. Cote. Cot.

92. Pent-house. A sloping roof projecting from a wall.

185. Chrysolite. A yellow-green stone, literally gold-stone.

ONE WORD MORE. Page 109

This is the only one of Browning's poems addressed directly to his wife. It was originally published as an epilogue to the volume *Men and Women*, which contained, as this poem tells us, fifty poems, each sketching an aspect of an individual soul, Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the rest. The scheme of the poem is simple. The poet reminds us of the lovers of the past who have given to the world the fruit of their obvious gift, but for the one beloved have always turned to some other art than their own. Raphael the painter, brings sonnets to his lady; Dante the poet, draws a picture. No artist lives and loves who does not "put to proof art alien to the artist's." Browning disclaims the power to use any other medium than poetry. "Verse and nothing else have I to give you." Yet, even so, he finds a difference between all his other work and this one poem which he offers to his love. This difference is contained in the perfect XIII and XIV stanzas. Most of Browning's work had been dramatic in intention, the words or the stories of other men. Here, he says, let me speak this once in my own person. The whole poem

is full of a profound emotion, an undescribable and abiding tenderness.

22. Her San Sisto names, etc. References to the most famous of Raphael's madonnas, the "Sistine Madonna" at Dresden, the "Madonna of Foligno" at Rome, the "Madonna del Granduca" at Florence, and the "Madonna of the Garden" ("La Belle Jardinière"), at the Louvre, in Paris.

27. Guido Reni. A Bolognese painter (1575–1642).

32. Dante once prepared to paint an angel. As related at the close of the *Vita Nuova*. Beatrice was, however, dead at this time.

37. His left hand i' the hair o' the wicked. See *Inferno* XXXII., where Dante thus compels a reluctant soul to speak.

41. Let the wretch go festering through Florence. The man referred to in line 37 was dead, but in other cases Dante places in the Inferno the souls of persons who were still alive.

74. He who smites the rock. See Exodus xvii. 6; Numbers xx. 11. Under this figure Browning represents the artist in relation to the people for whom he exercises his gift.

101. Jethro's daughter. Zipporah, the wife of Moses.

125. Missal-marge. The border of the mass-book.

148. Fiesole. A village on the hills, northeast of Florence.

150. Samminiato. The church of San Miniato on the height above Florence opposite Fiesole.

163. Zoroaster. The founder of the Persian religion, about 500 B. C.

164. Galileo. The Italian astronomer (1564–1642).

172. Sapphire. See Exodus xxiv. 10.

O LYRIC LOVE. Page 116

These lines, supremely lyrical and perfect as they are, were not, as one would suppose, put forth to stand by themselves, but are from the close of the first book of *The Ring and the Book*, Browning's longest and most sustained work. They are intended as an invocation to his wife, and a dedication to her of all his powers, and of whatever measure of achievement may be his.

23. Blessing back, etc. Browning thinks of himself as sending a blessing back to heaven.

IV

The fourth division of the volume is given to poems of character, poems which set forth the attitude toward life of various men, closing

with a few in which Browning speaks in his own person. Most of Browning's work is dramatic in the sense that he presents characters, or rather allows them to present themselves in their own words. The dramatic lyric and the monologue were two forms of which he was especially fond, and through them he brings before us an immense gallery of human figures, drawn from many races, and many periods of history. Many of these studies are interpretations of individual character, of types of human nature, or of whole epochs and movements. Sometimes Browning lets his hero present his case without a hint of taking sides for or against him. Often, however, we can easily see the moral which the poet would point for us, as in "Andrea del Sarto," and "The Grammarian's Funeral," and sometimes, as in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "Abt Vogler," and "Saul," he is so completely in sympathy with his speaker that we may take their utterances as expressing Browning's own philosophy of life.

THE PATRIOT. Page 117

This is a study of the relations of a leader to the fickle populace, — such a tragedy as Browning often must have caught hints of in his years of life in Florence when the Italian patriots were working for the liberation of their country. The tale is told swiftly, and for dramatic suggestion the poem is scarcely to be matched. The man who in one short year has known the extremes of popular idolatry and popular hatred speaks while on his way to execution. A year ago if he had asked for the sun, they would have said, "Yes, and what else?" Now he goes bound through the rain, a target for spiteful missiles, but since the score between God and him is for God to pay, he is content.

THE LOST LEADER. Page 119

In these verses Browning gives us another type of leader. It has been much disputed whether the poem refers to Wordsworth, who in his middle life abandoned the liberal views of his youth. Browning's own word is "I can only answer, with something of shame and contrition, that I undoubtedly had Wordsworth in mind, but simply as a model; you know an artist takes one or two striking traits in the features of his model and uses them to start his fancy on a flight which may end far enough from the good man or woman who happens to be sitting for nose or eye. I thought of the great Poet's abandonment of Liberalism at an unlucky juncture, and no repaying consequence

that I could ever see. But once call my fancy portrait Wordsworth, and how much more ought one to say!" Certainly this ought to pass as a denial, for the first lines of the poem strike a suggestion which it is hard indeed to fasten to Wordsworth.

MY LAST DUCHESS. Page 121

The poem suggests both a story and a portrait from the Italian Renaissance. The story is all behind the canvas. We are given the word "Ferrara," the famous city on the Adriatic ruled by the Este family, as index of locality, and forthwith our Duke speaks, apparently to an envoy who has come about the business of a second marriage. Courtly, suave, and with urbane nonchalance, the Duke presents the picture of the little Duchess, who had "a heart too soon made glad, too easily impressed," who knew not how to value her husband's gift of "a nine hundred years old name," and to whom he would not stoop even to explain his wishes. "I gave commands; then all smiles stopped together." The arrogant calm, the bland cruelty of this, and of the whole tragedy which it leaves out, can scarcely be matched. Mr. Arthur Symons says, "The poem is a subtle study in the jealousy of egoism, not a study so much as a creation; and it places before us, as if bitten out by the etcher's acid, a typical autocrat of the Renaissance, with his serene self-composure of selfishness, quiet, uncompromising cruelty, and genuine devotion to art."

3. **Fra Pandolf.** The name, like Claus of Innsbruck below, is imaginary.

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH. Page 123

The Bishop is another figure of the Renaissance, more vivid even than the Duke in "My Last Duchess." Ruskin says, "I know no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told of the Renaissance spirit, its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I said of the Central Renaissance in thirty pages of *The Stones of Venice* put into as many lines, Browning's being also the antecedent work." The dying prelate, petulant, suspicious, ignoble, speaks to his bedside watchers, the younger generation, who have come to see him die and to get his wealth. Old Gandolf is the

object of his spleen, who, living, envied him the mother of his sons, and dying, stole the spot in the church which he had picked for a last resting-place. In his scheming, his half-delirious pleading, and plotting to outwit and outdo his old rivals, the bishop lays bare every corner of his false, ambitious, villainous heart, and so doing, shows us the strange entanglement of warring elements which characterised the decaying Renaissance.

The Church of St. Praxed or Praxedes was built in honour of the maiden Praxedes, who lived about the time of Antoninus Pius. The present church is an extremely ornate affair, adorned with rare mosaics, and supplying an appropriate setting for the poem, though the Bishop and his tomb are entirely imaginary.

25. Basalt. A dark, greenish-black, and very hard species of marble.

31. Onion stone. Browning's English rendering of the Italian *cipollino*, a kind of greenish-white marble, splitting into coats like an onion (*cipolla*).

41. Olive-frail. A basket of rushes used for packing olives.

42. Lapis Lazuli. A brilliant blue stone.

46. Frascati villa. Frascati is a favourite resort, twelve miles from Rome, on the Alban hills.

48. God the Father's globe. In the church of Il. Gesu, at Rome, the altar of St. Ignatius is adorned with a group of the Trinity by Bernardino Ludovisi. The Father holds a globe, which is said to be the largest piece of lapis lazuli in existence.

58. Tripod. The three-legged chair on which the priest of Apollo sat while consulting the Delphic oracle. **Thyrsus.** A staff entwined with ivy, symbol of the rites of Bacchus.

56–61. The bas-relief, etc. These lines give an immensely vivid impression of the old sinner's real love of classic decoration, and his consummately brutal irreverence — Bacchus, the Nymphs, St. Praxedes, the Saviour, and Pan, all tossed together to make a sumptuous display.

66. Travertine. A white limestone.

69. Jasper. An opaque variety of quartz, of red, yellow, and other dull colours.

77. Tully's. Marcus Tullius Cicero.

79. Ulpian. A Roman jurist (170–228); evidently a person not famed for the purity of his prose.

82. God made and eaten. The sacrament.

89. Mortcloth. Pall.

97. Agate. A semi-pellucid, uncrystallized variety of quartz, presenting various tints in the same specimen.

99. Elucescebat. From the late Latin verb *elucesco*, to be famous. The Bishop shows a fine scorn of the lack of culture involved in choosing this word rather than *eluceo*, the classic form.

108. A visor and a Term. "A mask and a bust, springing from a square block, representing the Roman God Terminus, who presided over boundaries." These lines are curiously elliptical. "If you had any pity you would do more than I am asking, throw in a little more decoration." But no, he knows only too well hypocrisy and deceit. These sons of his will stow him away, under any miserable crumbling stone. They wish him dead, and — last pang for him who dies unmourned — he knows it.

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S. Page 127

"A Toccata of Galuppi's" presents another study of Italian life, this time of Venice in the eighteenth century. In its whimsical, half humourous, half melancholy appreciation of the old musician, the very metre suggesting the pleasant, trivial tinkle of the clavichord, it reflects the spiritual emptiness of the time as perfectly as "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's" reveals the more robust passion of an earlier age. We may figure Browning idly fingering this piece of old world music and dreaming over its stately elaborations; then, with a sad shake of the head, he breaks out: "Ah, Galuppi, how you give it all away, yourself and your time. What is this music but a mirror of the empty, soulless life of Venice of old. It is all here, the pride, the pleasure-seeking, the frivolity of lives that came to naught. One sees the fêtes where you were wont to furnish music for the company, where young people took their pleasure, where there was kissing and lovemaking, with perhaps an instant's pause to listen and to applaud, then back to life's whirl." This empty, cricket-like music is more truly the record of these old days than any reasoned picture we may draw.

Toccata. From *toccare*, to touch. A free, musical form not unlike the fantasia or impromptu. The poem is a comment on Galuppi's toccata; and, in its light flowing metre and capricious suggestion, it is also a toccata, or "touch-piece," in itself.

Galuppi. Baldassare Galuppi (1706–1784) was an Italian musician, noted in his day. Part of his life was spent in London, part in Russia, and the last in Venice, where he was organist at St. Mark's.

A brave improvisatore was old Galuppi, and justly popular among his contemporaries; an industrious composer too, whose fifty or more operas have somehow vanished from the world's attention.

6. St. Mark's. The great cathedral of Venice, named from St. Mark because the body of the evangelist was brought to Venice and enshrined there. — **Where the Doges.** The chief magistrate of Venice, in the days of the Republic, was called the doge, from Latin *Dux*, meaning leader (cf. Eng. "Duke"). This line refers to the custom maintained by the Doges from 1174 of "wedding the Adriatic" by the annual ceremony of a ring thrown into the sea. This ceremony was instituted by Pope Alexander III. in commemoration of a victory achieved by the Venetians in his defence over Frederic Barbarossa.

8. Shylock's bridge. The Rialto.

18. Clavichord. A stringed instrument played by keys, a forerunner of the modern pianoforte.

19. Lesser thirds. The allusions in this and the following stanzas show Browning's mastery of the technique of music. They are explained in *Poet Lore*, October, 1890, page 546, to which the reader is referred. "Lesser thirds" are minor thirds, and with the "diminished sixth," in which a note is held over into the next chord, give a mournful effect. "Suspensions," or dissonances, followed by "solutions," or concords, suggest both despair and hope, and the latter mood is strengthened by the "commiserating seventh," for "the minor seventh is so pleasing in its discord as to suggest concord." But delight is checked again when the "dominant's persistence," or the return of the original theme in the dominant key, is answered by a tonic octave, which suggests the inevitable fate, bringing both music and life to an end.

37. Yours for instance. A suggestion, as if from Galuppi, that the comment may be turned against his critic.

ANDREA DEL SARTO. Page 131

If we desire to realise how great a masterpiece of character drawing this poem is we must have some knowledge of the facts in the life of the painter Andrea, or rather, of what report gives us as the facts. That worthy gossip and chronicler of matters Florentine, Vasari, has left us a very illuminating account of the man who for his mere craftsmanship earned the title of "the faultless painter," but who, notwithstanding, never produced a really great picture. He was born in Florence in 1486 and died in 1531. As a youth he fell in love with

the wife of a capmaker, Lucrezia del Fede, whom, when her husband died, he forthwith married. Thereafter, according to Vasari, his life was one long subjection to her beauty and her caprice. It is her face which appears in almost all his pictures; she dominated his work, made him take commissions which he slighted or executed in haste, for the sake of money to squander on her; and at last she was the cause of his treachery towards Francis I. of France, his friend and patron. Andrea was prevailed upon to visit the French Court, where he was treated with great liberality and courtesy. "But one day came to him certain letters from Florence written by his wife with bitter complaints. Moved by all this, he resolved to resume his chains. Taking money which the king confided to him for the purchase of pictures and statues, — he set off, having sworn on the Gospels to return in a few months. Arrived in Florence he lived joyously with his wife for some time, making presents to her father and sisters, but doing nothing for his own parents, who died in poverty and misery. When the period specified by the king had come, he found himself at the end not only of his own money, but of that of the king. He remained in Florence, therefore, procuring a livelihood as he best might."

Whether all this is absolutely authentic and just is not for the moment our concern. Browning's poem is based on Vasari's estimate of the painter, and our object is to observe how subtly and skilfully the poet makes his speaker reveal himself just such a man as the historian has given us. In another part of his narrative Vasari says of Andrea: "There was a certain timidity of mind, a sort of diffidence and want of force in his nature, which rendered it impossible that those evidences of ardor and animation which are proper to the more exalted character should ever appear in him." In other words, the artist was weakly perfect instead of divinely imperfect. Therein lies the contrast which kindled the poet's imagination. He is supremely the believer in the lofty vision, even though accompanied by wholly disproportioned attainment. Again and again we find in his verse the cry of the "glory of the imperfect." And half the tragic force of this special poem comes from Andrea's own recognition of his bondage to the lower ideal through his sluggishness of soul. See his own words: "This low-pulsed forthright, craftman's hand of mine;" again, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what 's a heaven for?"

The incident which occasioned the writing of this poem was as follows: A cousin of Mrs. Browning asked for a copy of Andrea's portrait of himself and his wife which is now in the Pitti Palace,

Florence. Browning could not find a copy, and so wrote this poem, putting into verse what the portrait signified to him.

15. Fiesole. A suburb of Florence, lying out on the hillside to the northeast.

93. Morello. Monte Morello, the most conspicuous of the hills about Florence.

105. The Urbinate. Raphael Sanzio (1483–1520), who was born in Urbino.

130. Agnolo. Michael Angelo (1475–1564), sculptor and painter.

149. Francis. Francis I. of France (1494–1547).

150. Fontainebleau. A town and royal residence, thirty-five miles southeast of Paris.

241. Scudi. The scudo was worth about ninety-six cents.

263. Leonard. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), the painter of the "Last Supper" and the "Mona Lisa." Andrea's ambition flames for a second with the desire to be named as fourth with that immortal trio, Leonardo, Raphael, and Michael Angelo, who lived and worked contemporaneously.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL. Page 139

The following stanzas are presumably from the lips of one of the dead scholar's disciples. The absorption in learning, the passion for knowledge, not as a means to power but as an end in itself, was vastly characteristic of the early Renaissance. The measure of this poem is purely in harmony with its material; one feels a certain marching rhythm, an exalted gravity that soars, at the end, to some of the finest lines Browning ever produced. The poet would have us share in doing homage to the man whose life seemed the acme and essence of all that was bleak and bare and unvital, yet who, having chosen his task, pursued it with all his might to the very end, putting *to live* after *to know*. By the sheer nobility and strength of such verse Browning sweeps us along so that for the moment we have no doubt that the dry-as-dust old antiquarian is the noblest of God's creatures; but it must be confessed that on soberer reflection we protest a little against this exaltation of a life which, for practical purposes, was wasted, and even accuse Browning of wilful paradox in choosing his subject. But we must consider that Browning is seeking emphasis; he raises his praise of the resolute, devoted soul the higher by ruling out all discussion of the value of the ideal. The discoveries of the Grammarian may have been as remote from human

life as the Dark Tower of Childe Roland. The lesson of persistence and attainment is the same.

The poem is the best example of Browning's boldness and resource, which occasionally became rashness and eccentricity, in the matter of rhyme.

3. Crofts. Small enclosed fields used for pasture or tillage. — **Thorpes.** Small villages.

34 Apollo. The Greek God of manly beauty and of song.

86. Calculus. The disease known as the stone.

88. Tussis. A cough.

95. Soul-hydroptic. Soul-thirsty.

129. Hoti. Greek ὅτι, meaning *that.*

130. Oun. Greek οὖν, meaning *then.*

131. Enclitic De. Greek δε, concerning which Browning wrote to the editor of the *News*, London, Nov. 21, 1874: "In a clever article you speak of 'the doctrine of the enclitic *de* . . . which, with all deference to Mr. Browning, in point of fact, does not exist.' No, not to Mr. Browning: but pray, defer to Herr Buttmann, whose fifth list of enclitics ends with 'the inseparable *de*,' or to Curtius, whose fifth list ends also with *de* (meaning *towards*, and as a demonstrative appendage). That this is not to be confounded with the accentuated *dé*, meaning *but*, was the 'doctrine' which the grammarian bequeathed to those capable of receiving it."

134. Purlieus. Borders, or outlying places.

RABBI BEN EZRA. Page 144

The man whose name gives the title to this poem was a Jewish sage and philosopher, born in Spain in 1092. We have Mr. A. J. Campbell's authority for the statement that the distinctive characteristics of the Rabbi of the poem and the philosophy put into his mouth are drawn from the writings of the real Rabbi. This is an interesting fact to know, noteworthy as an instance (one of very many) of Browning's vast range of information and erudition. But it remains vividly clear that this poem, unlike "Andrea del Sarto," neither presupposes nor needs any knowledge, on our part, of the speaker. The form is the same, the monologue, but where Andrea was the revelation of an individual soul and of the causes for its shortcomings, "Rabbi Ben Ezra" is a general philosophical and religious scheme of life. The old man speaks, to be sure, but behind his words is none of his own individuality, but a broad impersonal statement of eternal values;

though in Stanza VII., and again in XXIV., let us not fail to note, we meet the same theme as in "Andrea del Sarto," Browning's great theme, "the glory of the imperfect."

The Rabbi urges that life be lived as if it were to lead to a climax, a flowering, in old age, "the last of life for which the first was made." Suppress, he says, none of the doubts and fears, the futile attempts and aspirations of youth. It is the brute's part to sink into satisfaction and surfeit of mere material things. Yet never despise the flesh; highest achievement is where flesh and spirit work together in harmony. Bearing this always before us we shall be ready for age, for the summing up of life's gains and losses. In the turn of things all the imperfect plans, the half-achieved deeds, the things dreamed but not dared, — these are to count with God. Then in age we shall see the ripened fruit of youth, and in death the crown and consummation of both.

84. Indue. Put on.

150. Whose wheel the pitcher shaped. The pitcher of clay shaped by the potter's wheel. The metaphor is biblical, cf. Isaiah lxiv. 8: "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay and thou our potter, and we all are the work of thy hand"; and Jeremiah xviii. 3, 6: "Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels." "As the clay is in the potter's hands so are ye in my hands, O house of Israel." Cf. also Fitzgerald's *Rubayat*, Stanzas 83–90.

ABT VOGLER. Page 152

In this poem we have as splendid a piece of imaginative interpretation of the power and scope of music as the most ardent musician-soul could desire. The poem is built upon a finely wrought metaphor, the conception of music as a palace of sound. As the composer proceeds, his fancy soars ever higher and higher, till he has evoked all of earth and heaven and the heavenly host as partakers in his creation. Music, being of all the arts the one which cannot be fixed and held, is, for that reason, capable of the most sublime flights, of the supremest expression of divine inspiration. "Here is the finger of God," that can frame "out of three sounds, not a fourth sound but a star." But when the sound has died away, the palaces have vanished, what then? asks Abt Vogler: Am I to be comforted by the thought that there shall be other palaces as fine or finer? Not so, he replies, there is a higher truth. Whatever good has been, is for-

ever; nothing is lost. Then follows, in Stanza X., the reiteration of that faith which we have met in other poems:

"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist," etc.

Abt Vogler. Abbé Vogler was born in Würzburg, Bavaria, in 1749. He founded a school of music at Mannheim, and another at Stockholm, Sweden, where he became famous for his performances on an instrument of his own invention which he called the Orchestrion, a compact organ, in which four keyboards of five octaves each, and a pedal board of thirty-six keys, were packed into a cube of nine feet. He travelled over Europe with this organ, and was received with great enthusiasm. At Darmstadt he opened a third school of music, and Meyerbeer and Weber became his pupils. He died in 1814.

3. Solomon willed. A reference to the Jewish tradition that Solomon possessed power over the demons and spirits of the air, through his knowledge of the unspeakable name of God, — the "ineffable name" of line 7.

23. Rome's dome. A reference to the illumination of the dome of St. Peter's for special festivals.

34. Protoplast. The first form or model from which others are copied.

91. Common chord. A chord consisting of the fundamental tone with its third and fifth.

96. C. Major. The natural scale with no sharps or flats, and therefore taken to represent the common things of life.

SAUL. Page 157

This poem is based on a passage in 1 Samuel, xvi. 14–23: "But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

"And Saul said unto his servants, provide me now a man that can play well.

"And David came to Saul and stood before him: and he loved him greatly.

"And it came to pass that David took a harp and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

David, the shepherd youth, still in the grasp of the tremendous emotional experience he has gone through, shaken and awe-stricken, tells how he was divinely inspired to rouse the great king from his deathly lethargy. He presents himself at the royal tent, is received

by Abner, Saul's chief captain, and at last finds himself in the presence of the monarch. Eager to sooth and cheer, he plays the melodies of out-of-doors; the tunes to which animals will respond, the sheep, and the quail, and the quick jerboa. Then, rising in the scale, he plays the tunes that express human endeavour and human relationship, — the help tune, he calls it, of the reapers, the chant of burial, the marriage hymn and the priests' chorus. As Saul betrays by a groan that he is moved, the little harper goes eagerly on, bursting into song as he plays, a song first of the sheer joy of living, and then of the responsibilities which crowd upon the mightiest figure in the outspread panorama of life, — "All brought to blaze on the head of one creature, King Saul." Here he pauses to watch the effect of that appeal, flung challenge-like at the inert figure; and in a magnificent metaphor, we learn how the king threw off his icebound despair and lived again. Still, he is passive. How, asks the singer, shall I rouse him to action? Then he summons all the ideals that have filled his soul in solitary hours of dreaming, and sings the joys of the spirit, — fame, the undying soul of great deeds, life in the memory of generations still unborn. As he sings, Saul slowly resumes his kingly poise, the old composure, the old dignity; and David gazing into his face, longing to offer the ultimate consolation, the transfiguring and transforming assurance that human life and human endeavour are justified and made worth while by some all-glorious end, sees in a flash the final truth, and, harp cast aside, erect, heart aflame, utters the great prophecy. God is omnipotent; in every manifestation of nature he stands revealed as the Almighty, of purpose infinite. But there is one step beyond infinite power, and that is infinite love, which is necessary to harmonise and vitalise the world. Through his own deep and yearning love for Saul and the desire to bring greater comfort, David discerns and proclaims the love of God incarnate and revealed to the world in the gift of His Son.

This poem, from almost every point of view, strikes us as perhaps the ripest of Browning's works. It was published (complete) in the volume which certainly represents the high-water mark of Browning's genius, *Men and Women* (1855). Structurally, technically, it is magnificent, a well-nigh flawless dramatic climax. The verse is broad, dignified, sonorous, wholly suited to the passionate exaltation and nobility of the theme. Mr. Arthur Symons says of it: "Music, song, the beauty of nature, the joy of life, the glory and greatness of man, the might of love, human and divine, — all these are set to an orchestral accompaniment of magnificent, continuous harmony."

The last stanza of the poem is worthy of note for its throbbing, vivid translation of human emotion into the outward manifestations of nature; the stars beat with emotion, the forests shudder, the wild beasts bear off with "wonder and dread," the birds rise heavily, "stupid with awe," nature is a-thrill with sympathy for man. This is an attitude rarely to be met in Browning's poetry. His whole feeling for nature is for a separate thing, an entity as it were apart, equally with man from the hand of God, but not the sharer of man's experiences. Beauty and joy, love and light are there, inherent in Nature, but they exist by themselves, not dependent upon man's grasp of them. (See note on "By the Fireside.") Yet here we find the poet swept along, as it were, by his conception of what David's mental state must be into an interpretation of nature wholly in terms of human emotion.

45. Jerboa. A small jumping animal of the rat family, with very long hind legs and tail; called also the jumping hare.

60. Levites. The sons of Levi were priests.

65. Male sapphires. Superior stones.

188. Paper-reeds. The papyrus from which paper was made by the Egyptians.

203. Hebron. The most southern of the three cities of refuge west of Jordan.

204. Kidron. A brook near Jerusalem.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL. Page 172

In the summer of 1847 Browning and his wife were at Ancona, a sea-town on the east coast of Italy. From here they made three different journeys to Fano, a distance of about thirty miles, to see this picture, in the church of St. Augustine, which seems to have captivated Browning's imagination, though it has never been held a great work of art. He describes it to us, haloed, as it were, by the emotion roused in him. The picture represents an angel watching over a little child who kneels in prayer, gazing heavenward. To change places with that child is the poet's desire, once to feel the healing of that great touch, and thereafter to view the world with eyes of faith, as God made it to be viewed.

36. Guercino. Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, nicknamed Guercino, the "squint-eyed," a painter of the Bolognese school (1590–1666).

37. Alfred. Alfred Domett, a dear friend of Browning's. Both were born at Camberwell within a year of one another (1811 and 1812). Domett was known among his contemporaries as a promising

young poet, and is remembered for the Christmas poem beginning, "It was a calm and silent night." In 1841 he was admitted to the bar. A year later he went out to New Zealand, where he remained for thirty years, becoming prime minister of that colony. He is the subject of Browning's poem "Waring." He died in 1887.

55. Wairoa. A river in New Zealand.

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND. Page 175

This poem and "The Englishman in Italy" (see page 55) were written after Browning's visit to Italy in 1844. They form a striking study in contrasting mood and experience. The Englishman in Italy sees the beauty of landscape and peasant life, and reminds himself in the last lines of political troubles at home. The Italian in exile in England remembers only the slavery of his country and the testing of his life in the struggle for freedom.

19. Metternich. The chief minister of Austria from 1809 to 1848 and leader in the policy of repression in Italy.

76. Tenebræ. (Latin, *darkness.*) On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of Holy Week in the late afternoon the matins and lauds of the day following are sung. At the beginning of the office fifteen candles are lighted; these are gradually extinguished, except one, which symbolizes the resurrection.

INSTANS TYRANNUS. Page 180

The title of this poem was suggested by Horace's ode (III. iii. 1.) beginning,

> Justum et tenacem propositi virum
> Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
> Non voltus instantis tyranni,

which may be translated "The man of firm purpose in a righteous cause is not shaken by the frenzy of his fellow citizens, nor by the face of a threatening tyrant." The poem treats the matter from the point of view of the latter.

18. Perdue. Lost.

21. Spilth. What is spilled.

33. Nit. The egg of a louse, and hence any small object or speck.

PROSPICE. Page 183

Though the poems which follow do not properly belong with the group of "character poems," they are placed here as a fitting climax to that part of Browning's poetry which contains his larger views, his philosophy of life. "Prospice" ("Look Forward") was written in the autumn following Mrs. Browning's death (1861). It reveals both his abiding sadness at her loss and his abiding courage for the battle of life without her, and it ends with a ringing cry of sheer triumphant passion.

EPILOGUE TO "ASOLANDO." Page 184

This epilogue comes fittingly at the end of the volume, as it is the last poem that Browning wrote, his ultimate legacy of the high faith that was in him. He believed in the glorious destiny of mankind, in the perfection to be attained after perpetual striving, and he held it the highest privilege of man to be ever a fighter. He left us this temper as his last legacy, and he could not have left us a better thing. It was not only his doctrine but his life that blazed out in the words, "One who never turned his back but marched breast forward."

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